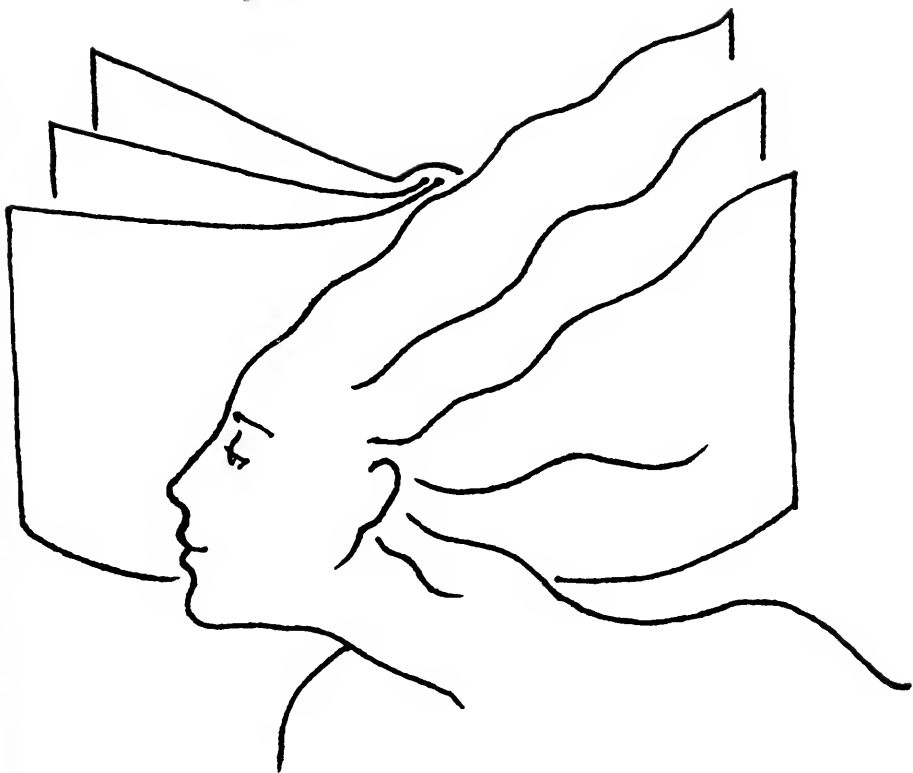


Writing Women



PAROLES GELEES

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UCLA French Studies

*Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de
rechercher si, par hasard, se trouvait ici
l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.*

Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre*

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The (Wo)Man in the Iron Mask: Cross-dressing, Writing and Sexuality in *L'Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville*

Deborah J. Hahn

In contrast to the wealth of literary and cultural criticism investigating the significance of transvestism in early modern England, there have been relatively few studies of this question in the French tradition of the same period. This lacuna appears even more curious once one considers the extent to which cross-dressing is a recurrent motif in early modern French literature and culture. For example, in the seventeenth century alone, cross-dressing comes into play in works as diverse as d'Urfé's *L'Astrée*, Sorel's *Françion*, Molière's *Le Dépit amoureux*, Mme de Villeglé's *Mémoires de la vie d'Henriette Sylvie de Molière*, and Préchac's *Le Beau Polonais*, just to name a few. Transvestism is also historically significant in part because it is not an isolated literary phenomenon, but rather an integral aspect of a variety of early modern cultural practices that crossed class boundaries. In addition to being a traditional element of popular celebrations of Carnival, there is evidence that transvestism was part and parcel of French aristocratic entertainment, and not just during Mardi Gras. Catherine Velay-Vallentin aptly situates the French Court's interest in cross-dressing within a context of entertainment practices that included a growing infatuation with *trompe l'œil*, magic lanterns and other newly created theatrical machines:

Le thème du travestissement, artifice théâtral ou procédé littéraire, règne sur les mœurs festives de la Cour au XVII^e siècle en cliché neutralisé de toute prétention scandaleuse. Image du renversement, il est considéré comme une simple figure de rhétorique visuelle et peut être rattaché à l'engouement général pour tout ce qui se rapporte à l'illusion optique: constructions en trompe l'œil, lanternes magiques, jeux de miroirs, anamorphoses, cabinets fantastiques, etc. (86)

As Velay-Vallentin suggests, given the general fascination with optical illusion so prevalent at the court of Louis XIV, the practice of transvestism is not necessarily connected to cultural critique. Taking into account the larger context of cultural fascination with illusion, is the figure of the transvestite solely to be considered a neutralized "simple figure of visual rhetoric?" With regard to the late seventeenth century, a historical period known for heated culture wars that included controversies about "the proper boundaries of male and female gender roles" (Seifert 7), the figure of the transvestite seems more politically charged than neutral, suggesting that there is more at stake here than innocent fascination with optical illusion.

Whereas it may prove anachronistic to invest the practice and representation of cross-dressing in the early modern period with the conscious activism surrounding cultural politics of drag in twentieth-century America, the goal of this essay is to invite reflections on the interplay between the literary representation of transvestism in seventeenth-century literature and the history of gender and sexuality. For the purposes of this article, the cross-dressed figure functions as a privileged locus for study of the politically charged field of cultural perceptions about identity, especially of the discursive role that sex and gender play in the formation of such identificatory practices. Gender here is to be understood as Judith Butler conceives of the term, that is as the "cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes" (*Gender Trouble* 6). Butler's thoughts on drag also inform the conception of the transvestite presented here as "a site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes" (*Bodies that Matter* 125). The cross-dressing motif is especially important in the context of questions concerning women writers and writing women, given the challenges women writers have faced in constituting themselves as authors in patriarchal society.¹ With regard to women, writing and the cross-dressing motif in seventeenth-century texts, in many cases, the transvestism focuses upon a female character's masquerade, giving literal credence to the adage that behind every good man lies a good woman. More often than not in this type of fiction, the author makes the reader aware of the gender play; transvestism thereby cultivates the reader's

role by fostering pleasure in watching the cross-dressed female character's development through a process of masking or re-writing of her gendered identity within the diegesis. At the same time, fictional plots or sub-plots involving such gender-bending often conclude with the cross-dressed character's feminine identity being unmasked so that she would be free to marry, bringing to the fore the many cultural codes governing femininity and masculinity and highlighting the way that heterosexual coupling takes precedence over the constitution of an autonomous self.

Due in large part to the convergence of the literary convention equating a happy ending (marriage) with the unveiling of the cross-dressed disguise in transvestite tales, Butler's efforts to link the question of the materiality of the body to that of the performativity of gender will provide a useful backdrop for this essay. According to Butler, "the regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative" (*Bodies that Matter* 2). Taking one particular text as an example—the 1695 tale *L'Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville*—this essay intends to focus upon the performative aspects of masculine and feminine identity in order to bring to the fore the way that cross-dressing ultimately reinforces the regulatory norms governing sex in a society that is profoundly marked by a heterosexual imperative.²

It should be clear by now that *L'Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* is not the sole seventeenth-century text in which cross-dressing plays a significant role. However, this particular tale has been chosen for discussion because it is unique in many ways. On the one hand, whereas many fairy, folk and *galant* tales of the 1680s and 1690s include cross-dressed heroines, the cross-dressing motif in *L'Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* is doubly determined (if not overdetermined): the tale concludes with the marriage of a cross-dressed man to a cross-dressed woman. Furthermore, a brief discussion of the publication history will attest that the tale is marked by cross-dressing at the authorial level, making it an example of literary cross-dressing that bears significance for the history of early modern women writers and readers.

L'Histoire de la Marquise Marquis de Banneville first appeared in the February 1695 issue of the *Mercure galant* and was republished in the August-September 1696 issue of the same magazine, this time with slight revisions. Each month, editor Donneau de Visé presented his readers with a literary selection in addition to news, literary criticism, death, birth and marriage notices, as well as a section devoted to the latest happenings at Versailles. Upon publication of *L'Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville*, de Visé introduced the story with a message to his readers—special attention that was reserved for a limited number of the literary texts he published. He lauds the qualities of both author and character in an honorific statement that claims that this story makes an excellent object lesson for women wishing to cultivate a certain *délicatesse d'esprit*. His comment reveals a belief that women and men are essentially different in nature:

Les Dames ont toujours reçu de grandes louanges sur une certaine délicatesse d'esprit qui leur est particulière. Elle paroist dans tous les Ouvrages qu'elles donnent au Public et il vous sera facile de les reconnoistre dans l'histoire que je vous envoie. Elle est d'une personne de vostre Sexe qui s'exprime avec beaucoup d'agrément et de finesse. Il seroit à souhaiter qu'elle voulust écrire souvent. Elle peint les choses avec des couleurs très vives et je me tiens assuré que cette lecture vous fera plaisir. Ne soyez pas surprise du titre; il convient à l'avanture. (qtd. in Roche-Mazon 22)

From this introduction, it would appear that the author of *L'Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* is none other than an up-and-coming woman writer whose talent stems from her ability to express a particularly feminine *je ne sais quoi*. However, according to critics Soriano and Mazon, de Visé himself was never certain who authored the tale he so readily attributed to a woman writer (Soriano 67-68; Mazon 32-35).

To this day, the actual authorship of the tale is unknown and literary critics have periodically attributed the tale to writers of both sexes, notably Charles Perrault, Marie-Jeanne Lhéritier de Villandon, and François-Timoléon de Choisy. The most convincing hypotheses establish the *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* as the product of a salon writer's collaboration between two or more of these authors, even if Mazon and Soriano disagree

as to the exact composition of the partnership. Perrault and his niece are and were well-known authors of literary tales of all types whose work had already been published in the *Mercure galant* by 1695-96. The other participant in the authorship of the tale, the Abbé de Choisy, is less well known to posterity. Although by the end of his life François Timoléon de Choisy (1644 - 1724) had been a member of the Académie Française, special envoy to Siam, canon of the Bayeux cathedral, historiographer and hagiographer to the king, he is perhaps best remembered as being one of the most prominent cross-dressers in seventeenth-century French history. Since anecdotes from his life mesh with certain elements in the fictional tale, regardless of the extent to which the Abbé de Choisy actually participated in the writing of *L'Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville*, it is clear that his transvestism influenced the development of the main character. Therefore the biography of this man, which has largely been gathered from his extensive memoirs, will figure prominently in discussion of the representation of transvestism in this literary work.³ In concluding this brief commentary on the obscure circumstances surrounding the tale's publication history, the most relevant fact to highlight is that publisher Donneau de Visé—regardless of his suspicions or knowledge that the text had been co-authored by Choisy, Villandon and/or Perrault—deemed necessary to attribute the text to an upcoming woman author. In either creating or maintaining the fiction of the existence of a solitary woman writer endowed with an acute *delicatesse d'esprit*, de Visé used literary transvestism to champion the cause of woman writers, casting a deliberate appeal to his largely female readership.

Whereas de Visé's message to his readership encourages the woman writer to continue to author and publish her tales without making specific allusion to the *querelle des femmes* (an ongoing debate about the role of women in society that had been rekindled at the end of the seventeenth century), the author's introductory message to the readers situates the story a bit more firmly within contemporary debates about women, writing and education. To a certain degree, the author's own commentary recreates the dialogic nature of the debates. Critic Mary Rowan agrees that the fictitious construction of a young woman's narrative voice is a definite strategy employed by the author or authors to add complexity to the tale, and she draws attention to a statement in the

opening paragraph in which the use of the first person plural identifies the narrator with other women writers: "Il ne faut donc pas nous donner pour plus que nous ne valons" (*Banneville* 44). However, in contending that the opening paragraph indicates that "the narrator disparages the products of women's attempts to write" (228), Rowan misses much of the richness in the authorial style. More careful analysis of the opening comments reveals an awareness of the binds restricting women writers of the time, as the authorial voice also defends a woman's right to write (and to read), based upon the merits of the female sex: "Puis que les Femmes se meslent d'écrire, et se piquent de bel esprit, je ne veux pas demeurer la dernière à signaler mon zèle pour mon Sexe..." (*Banneville* 44). It is true that the author reveals that women's writing cannot fairly be compared to men's, but the difference in men's and women's education is at the heart of their differing ability to produce works of literary value, and not their innate qualities. The author addresses such issues in an ambiguous manner, in statements such as the following: "Croire qu'une jeune Fille assez jolie, élevée parmy les rubans, soit capable d'écrire comme M Pelisson, c'est un abus" (44). Why could this young woman not be able to write in the manner of the illustrious Pellisson? Is it because she is by nature condemned to inferior intellect? Is not the nature of her inadequacy merely the result of her limited education?

The ambiguity is resolved almost immediately. By warning that her own tale may distract women over the age of twenty from the more serious occupations of being a good housewife or preparing to be one, the author takes on one of the guiding principles of Mme de Maintenon and Fénelon's reforms of girls' education:

Voicy donc mon coup d'essay, vous en jugerez, Mesdemoiselles, car c'est à vous que je m'adresse, mais si vous avez passé vingt ans, je vous défens de me lire. Cherchez quelque chose de plus solide. Une fille à vingt ans doit songer à se faire bonne menagere, et le temps de badinage est bien avancé pour elle. (44)

This comment introduces the author's characteristic ironic tone, a crucial key to understanding this narrative. Are we really to believe that her story only bears diminutive value, that it is just "une petite Histoire" designed to amuse? Does the author really think women would be better off thinking of their wifely duties

rather than reading, be it for pleasure or education? The author evokes a similar rhetorical strategy concerning the veracity of her tale: "n'allez pas douter de ce que je m'en vais vous dire" (45). Despite her claim to "ocular proof" ("J'ay tout vû, tout sceu, tout entendu: je suis oculaire sur ce point" [45]), the author's introduction to *L'Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* suggests that reasons deeper than a desire to recount some singularly amusing events are at the heart of this tale. Socio-political commentary on questions pertaining to women's role in society are clearly inscribed in the story.

As for the genre, *L'Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* is traditionally considered a *conte galant*, as opposed to a fairy or folk tale, although as Rowan suggests, the tale playfully alludes to a number of the characteristics of the popular fairy tale genre outlined by Propp in *Morphology of the Folktale* (Rowan 227). The tale should also be understood as a seventeenth-century rewrite of Ovid's version of the story of Iphis and her marriage to Ianthe in the *Metamorphoses*, an intertextual reference that situates *L'Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* as the product of someone familiar with classical works of literature in vogue in the salon milieu. The first sentence of the story proper presents a reworking of traditional fairy tale conclusions in which marriage resolves all tensions in the narrative. In this case, "happily ever after" is cut short to six months by the death of the husband: "Il n'y avoit que six mois que le Marquis de Banneville estoit marié à une jeune personne, belle, de beaucoup d'esprit et héritière, lorsqu'il fut tué au combat de Saint-Denis" (45). The widow, who like the majority of fairy tale heroines has a well-defined marital status but no name, is associated with the traditionally desirable characteristics for women of her time: she is young, beautiful, intelligent, rich, and most of all, faithful to her husband's memory.

The widow retires to the country to mourn, only to discover that she is pregnant. At first, she rejoices at the prospect of reproducing her husband's likeness in the world, assuming that the child will be "un petit modèle de ce qu'elle avoit tant aimé," that is, a boy (45). Upon further reflection, she fears the birth of a son, knowing that he would ultimately be required, as her husband before him, to go to battle in the service of his king. In this way the tale assigns military glory to men. However, instead of glorifying the military, the widow conceives of this masculine order in

a negative fashion. Whereas many fairy and folk tales romanticize the aristocratic bonds between warrior class and king, in this story, the author puts this relationship into question. Hoping to avoid losing another loved one to the demands of the State, the woman wishes for the birth of a daughter: "elle souhaite mille fois que le Ciel lui donnast une fille, qui par son Sexe se trouvast à couvert d'une si cruelle destinée" (45). In addition to the masculine/feminine dichotomy, the widow's decision is also framed in terms of an opposition between nature and culture: "Elle ... se mit en teste de corriger la nature, si elle ne répondoit pas à ses desirs" (45). The widow's reflections upon the sex of her child thus bring social imperatives to the fore as in the very beginning of the tale. Nature can be corrected. Regardless of the child's sex at birth, a newly gendered identity can be constructed.

The widow actively devises a strategy to raise her child as a girl, regardless of the baby's biological sex. To the extent that she privileges the private mother-child bond at the expense of her public duties to the State, the woman's decision can be interpreted as a subversion of political authority. The plan's successful execution requires a literal expenditure, and to persuade a midwife and a nurse to go along with her scheme, the widow must pay them: "La nourrice fut aussi gagnée" (46). With its double meaning of "to win" or "to earn" the verb "gagner" underscores that pay-off was a prerequisite to winning over these women to the plan. The widow does not have natural allies: money takes the place of a fairy godmother. "L'argent fait tout," the author tells us, thereby highlighting the role of culture in this tale's reversal of typical fairy tale enchantments (45).

The opening descriptions of young Mariane establish a firm link between the fictional character and historical figure the Abbé de Choisy. In conformity with the typical education of all *filles de qualité* of her time, Mariane is taught to dance and to play the harpsichord. The Abbé de Choisy also was instructed in these disciplines; his mother especially delighted in his talents on the harpsichord. Young Mariane, like the boys of her time, is also taught languages, history and philosophy: "Une si grande facilitée de génie força sa Mère à luy faire apprendre les Langues, l'Histoire et même la Philosophie nouvelle, sans craindre que tant de Sciences se brouillassent dans une teste où tout se rangeoit avec un ordre incroyable" (46). This commentary on the child's education

inscribes early modern debates surrounding the "natural" proclivities and abilities of girls and boys into the story. Girls' brains were considered physically incapable of handling serious subjects such as philosophy whereas boys were considered naturally endowed with the capacity to study these topics. The example of fictional Mariane is complex. Her aptitude is described as "incredible," but because the reader is always conscious that Mariane is a boy dressed as a girl, he could infer that Mariane's underlying maleness is at the base of her successful entry into the logical universe. However, within the diegesis, Mariane's success is never questioned along gender lines. None of the *maîtres* who teach the child these subjects are aware of her transvestism and the author does not provide any commentary on the part of the *maîtres* that would imply their surprise that a girl could display such intelligence. Mariane's success thus makes a case for Poullain de la Barre's argument that "[l]'esprit n'a point de sexe" (qtd. in Albistur 162). An active participant in the *querelle des femmes*, in the 1673 treatise *De l'Egalité des deux sexes* Poullain champions the idea that women and men, although different in body, are equal in mind, and that their respective education and upbringing makes for disparity between the sexes. When women are properly educated, they too can have natural proclivities. Whatever the reader's conclusion, it certainly appears that the author is employing the transvestite body to further debates about gender boundaries and intelligence.

The author continues to provoke such reflections by pointing out that it is precisely her physical beauty that renders Mariane's intelligence acceptable in the eyes of the public: "ce qui ravissoit en admiration, c'est qu'un esprit si beau sembloit estre dans le corps d'un Ange" (46). Beauty is the great enabler, although the expression "sembloit estre" hints that the author is warning that in affairs of external beauty, things are not always what they seem. The author's playful tone can again be noted during the elaboration of the child's physical beauty: "Sa taille à douze ans estoit déjà formée. Il est vray qu'on l'avoit un peu contrainte dès l'enfance avec des corps de fer, afin de luy faire venir des hanches, et de luy faire remonter la gorge" (46). Thanks to the understatement "il est vray" and "un peu contrainte," the reader can sense that the author is ironically highlighting the extent to which this boy must have suffered while his body was constrained by an iron corset. Once

again, the tale gently mocks the magical enchantments so common to fairy tales. However, this reference to the use of an iron corset is not a purely fictional creation, but is instead an allusion to the way the Abbé de Choisy's mother altered his body, clothing, and accessories when cross-dressing her son. In accordance with women's fashions of the time, young Timoléon's *just-au-corps* were replaced with skirts, he wore women's cloaks, had pierced ears adorned with diamond earrings, and habitually painted beauty marks (*mouches*) on his face. In addition, in order to prevent the growth of chest and facial hair, Mme de Choisy rubbed her son's chest and chin with an ointment whose active ingredients included arsenic and sulfur. The most drastic element of this process, however, was probably the iron corset his mother made him wear in order to constrain her son's waist and chest, thereby creating the illusion of a young girl's figure. The explicit reference to the iron corset in the fictional tale suggests a fascination with the important role materiality and artifice play in the construction of identity. Trapped in the iron corset, the true life case of the Abbé de Choisy and the fictional model Mariane are two examples of the way preconceived notions of physical beauty mask potentially painful ways of artificially shaping the human body to meet social demands.

Certainly, the salon society in the age of Louis XIV was well aware of the importance of bodily performance in meeting such social demands. The image of Mariane at her *toilette* reflects the importance of estheticization to the construction of an aristocratic identity. Mariane's narcissism is nurtured by her being the object of the aristocratic gaze, an allusion to the dress rituals so important to the adoration of Louis XIV's body:

Elle passoit elle-même dans ses oreilles, avec une grace admirable, des pendans, ou de Perles, ou de Rubis, ou de Diamans. Elle mettoit des mouches, et sur tout des imperceptibles, qui estoient si petites qu'il falloit avoir le teint aussi délicat et aussi fin qu'elle l'avoit, pour qu'on le put appercevoir. (47)

Further consideration indicates that in Mariane's case, such enchantment involves the fetishization of her body, since the author details the way necklaces, bracelets, earrings, and facial beauty marks (both *mouches* and *imperceptibles*) all contribute to the elaboration of stereotypical feminine beauty. Mariane at her *toilette*, like

the subject of poetical *blasons*, is a beautiful body transformed into many parts. Thus the description of the many accessories required in the estheticization of Mariane's body shows that her beauty depends upon fragmentation.

The detailed description of Mariane's performance of feminine dressing rituals (i.e. the performance of her gender) also plays upon the reader's knowledge of the transvestism of her body. It is important to underscore the name of the most potent beauty marks Mariane paints on her face—*les imperceptibles*. The joke shared by author and reader is that a whole other level of imperceptibility marks her body. How much importance would her admirers, who in this part of the text are mostly men, attribute to the *imperceptibles* emphasizing Mariane's lovely complexion if they knew the truth of her biological sex? Would they be repulsed by same-sex physical desire? Or, is the implication here that Mariane is the ultimate object of these men's desire because of her hidden sex? The fact that Mariane's body is a transvestite body leads the reader to question perceptions about gender, sex and (homo)sexual desire.

A few more details about the Abbé de Choisy's life may clarify the subtle links between cross-dressing and homosexuality evoked in this tale. The Abbé's memoirs reveal that his mother dressed him as a girl whenever it was time for her son to play with Philippe d'Orléans, Louis XIV's younger brother:

On m'habillait en fille toutes les fois que le petit Monsieur [Philippe d'Orléans] venait au logis, et il y venait au moins deux ou trois fois la semaine. J'avais les oreilles percées, des diamants, des mouches, et toutes les autres petites afféteries auxquelles on s'accoutume fort aisément et dont on se défait fort difficilement. (Choisy 219)

The Abbé's mother, Jeanne-Olympe de Choisy, was a well-known figure at the court of Louis XIII and during the Regency. Amongst the numerous potential interpretations of her action, a political reading of Mme de Choisy's decision to cross-dress her son is perhaps the most convincing. According to this hypothesis, Jeanne-Olympe de Choisy's decision can be interpreted as a political act designed to ingratiate her and her family to young Louis XIV's influential minister, Cardinal Mazarin, by establishing François-Timoléon as a special friend of Philippe d'Orléans who, even at a young age, was known for his homosexual tendencies.

To make sense of the link between Timoléon de Choisy's dress and the presence of Philippe d'Orléans, it is important to remember the way in which Mazarin manipulated cultural perceptions of Philippe's and Louis's gender identity and sexual preference to political ends. In recollections he shared with his great-nephew, the marquis d'Argenson, the Abbé himself interprets Mazarin's manipulation of Philippe's identity as a political decision: "c'était par un effet de la politique du cardinal Mazarin que l'on élevait Monsieur, frère de Louis XIV, de la manière la plus efféminé, qui devait le rendre pusillanime et méprisable..." (qtd. in Cruysse 51). The Cardinal's plan to render Philippe d'Orléans effeminate in the public eye served a double purpose. Firstly, Mazarin wanted to insure that Philippe wouldn't be a direct threat to the king's accession to the throne, as had been the case with Louis XIII's brother, Gaston. Secondly, the Cardinal believed that having an effeminate younger brother would serve to enhance Louis XIV's image, the implication being that heightened masculinity would lead to increased authority at the court and in the eyes of his subjects.

Mazarin's use of effeminacy as a political strategy suggests that Thomas Laqueur's comments about effeminacy in sixteenth-century England are also pertinent for France in the age of Louis XIV. According to Laqueur, effeminacy "was understood as a condition of instability, a state of men who through excessive devotion to women became more like them" (123). Young Choisy's role in Mazarin's strategy operated both on the level of effeminacy and on that of homosexuality. With regard to the former, if excessive devotion to women was supposed to be detrimental to Philippe's masculine identity because it could make him become more like a girl, then it stands to reason that excessive devotion to a boy dressed as a girl should further trouble his development, by implying that a boy could be demasculinized to such an extent that he could, as in the case of Choisy, actually *become* a girl in the eyes of the world. The question of homosexuality, however, is harder to determine since it is impossible to know if Philippe understood Choisy's dress to be a sexual masquerade. However, since Choisy makes clear that his mother dressed him as a girl specifically at those times when he accompanied Philippe d'Orléans, and by extension, not at all times, it is possible to infer that others at the court, if not the young Choisy himself, saw through the mask.

Philippe's affection for Timoléon thereby suggests to the public eye that in feeling special affection for a man dressed as a woman, the "homosexual" prince has become so much like a woman that he too harbors sexual desire for men. At the same time, cross-dressing evacuates some of the potential scandal, by masking a same-sex erotic attraction in the cloak of heterosexual desire. Paraphrasing Judith Butler, it appears that Mazarin's goal of reducing Philippe's status in the eyes of the Court—a plan facilitated in part by Mme de Choisy's cross-dressing of her son—shows that transvestism is indeed a locus for the revelation of the ways in which regulatory norms of the material body are at the service of a heterosexual imperative.

Within the framework of the fictional tale, similar logic underscores the provocative nature of Mariane's relations with her male suitors. Although Mariane can take pleasure at being the object of their gaze, from the reader's perspective a heterosexual imperative prevents her from allying herself with any of them in a marriage. The tale allows for an imperceptible same-sex erotic attraction, but rejects an overt alliance between Mariane and these young men.

The rejection of the suitors is played out, however, along class and not gender lines, for Mariane herself has no knowledge of her true sex. Mariane's relation to her suitors thus focuses on connections between physical beauty and social status. Instinctively, Mariane knows that there is more to life than pleasing young provincial suitors. Mariane tolerates these young men, but she does not love them. In performing the daily ritual of her *toilette* in front of these provincials, Mariane is only rehearsing for a future part on the greater stage of Paris and the world of the Court. Once again, the fictional Marianne proves analogous to the Abbé de Choisy. Perhaps second only to having taught her son to write, the most valuable lesson that Mme de Choisy probably imparted to Timoléon was that above all else, the subject that really mattered was "l'art de plaire à la Cour." She reminded him of his bourgeois bloodline, and encouraged him to cultivate friendships with those of higher birth than himself:

Ecoutez, mon fils; ne soyez point glorieux et songez que vous n'êtes qu'un bourgeois Mais apprenez de moi qu'en France on ne reconnaît de noblesse que celle d'épée. La nation, toute guerrière, a mis la gloire dans les armes. Or, mon fils, pour n'être

point glorieux, ne voyez jamais que des gens de qualité. (Choisy 24)

Thus, it appears that gender considerations are inextricably linked to those of social class: cross-dressing her son was only useful in so far as it could advance Choisy's status amongst the nobility. The Abbé followed his mother's advice, and in fact, over the course of his long life, well-placed friends bailed him out of more than one difficult situation, both financial and social in nature.

In the case of fictional Mariane, just before her entry into the *mondain* world of Paris, the mother reminds herself (and the reader) that her plan has successfully prevented her son from taking his place in the masculine symbolic order: "il a douze ans, disoit-elle tout bas, il faudrait bien tost songer à le mettre à l'Academie, et dans deux ans il suivroit son pauvre Père" (47). Like Choisy's mother, the fictional widow has succeeded in manipulating the social structures of her time. Instead of entering the male Académie, the next step in Mariane's education, her entry into the world of the Parisian aristocracy, can be considered a literary nod to the scenes of feminine sexual initiation so central to seventeenth-century erotic (if not pornographic) texts such as *L'Ecole des filles* or *L'Académie des dames*. Once again, the question of same-sex attraction will come into play as yet another reminder that the performance of gender is always tied up with questions of sexuality and dominant heterosexual imperatives.

In Paris, the Comtesse d'Alitref (a supposed anagram for Mme de Lafayette, itself a playful inscription of a woman writer into the tale) takes charge of the next level of Mariane's instruction. The description of the Comtesse's relationship to her husband is particularly interesting, hinting that the Comtesse's sexual preference leads her to favor women: "La Comtesse née pour la joye avoit trouvé le moyen de se séparer d'un Mary incommode, non qu'il ne fust homme de mérite, aimant le plaisir aussi bien qu'elle, mais, ne convenant pas dans le choix de leurs plaisirs, ils avoient l'esprit de ne vouloir point se contraindre et de suivre chacun son inclination" (47). In this way, *L'Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* affirms the presence of "lesbian" desire in early modern literature, an erotic history of women which, as Valerie Traub has shown, is not easy to trace. The text makes clear that the Comtesse is much taken with Mariane: "La Comtesse fut frappée de la beauté de

Mariane, et la baisa avec tant de plaisir qu'elle y retourna plusieurs fois" (47). Even though the verb "baiser" did not signify the sexual act in the seventeenth century, the woman's kisses can be read as an indicator that the Comtesse felt some level of physical desire for the child she believes to be a girl. The older woman takes pleasure in her affection for the young girl. However, Mariane's transvestism problematizes the concept of lesbian desire because although the relation between the Comtesse and Mariane is affirmed on one level, Mariane's mother's comments nonetheless negate the possibility of such relations. The narrator reveals cultural anxiety surrounding "lesbian" relations by describing the mother's reaction to the Comtesse: "Elle connoissoit assez la réputation de la Comtesse, qui estoit un peu équivoque, et jamais elle ne luy eust confié sa véritable fille..." (47). Mariane's transvestism therefore highlights the power of the heterosexual imperative: had Mariane really been a girl, the mother never would have been comfortable leaving her with the sexually deviant Comtesse. Erotic attraction between women is troubling; the reader is forcefully reminded that Mariane's underlying masculine sexuality neutralizes any anxiety caused by the equivocal nature of the Comtesse.

Freed from concerns that the Comtesse could ever sexually "corrupt" her child, Mariane's mother is nonetheless pleased to allow the wealthy and well-connected woman to perform the role of "fairy godmother," sending her carriage to escort young Mariane to the equivalent of Cinderella's ball: "La Comtesse luy envoyoit son Carosse aussi tost après dîné, et la menoit à la Comédie, à l'Opéra, et dans des maisons de Jeu" (49). Mariane becomes the object of admiration everywhere she goes, especially in the eyes of women: "Certain charme caché, dont elles sentoient l'impression sans s'en apercevoir, entraînoit leurs cœurs, et les forçoit à rendre un hommage sincère au mérite de la petite Marquise" (48). They supposedly adore Mariane for the way that her fine upbringing highlights her natural beauty and intelligence, "Un extérieur si charmant estoit soutenu par tout ce qu'une bonne éducation peut ajouter à une nature excellente" (49), but as had been the case with the *imperceptibles*, the author is playfully reminding the reader that Mariane's special hidden charm can be attributed to her sex, once again re-affirming the dominant heterosexual mode. Mariane's social success is ironic, however, since her natural, feminine qualities are the pure product of artificial construction.

The distinction between the natural and artificial aspects of the protagonist's identity are further highlighted during a scene that takes place at a masked ball. Actually, the author specifies that the scene is held during Carnival, a festive time traditionally associated with challenges to the dominant social order. On the surface level of the diegesis, Mariane's costume in no way threatens to undermine existing aristocratic social codes. She attends the ball dressed as a simple shepherdess, a direct allusion to *L'Astrée*, d'Urfé's seventeenth-century novel that romanticized peasant life in the service of a pastoral aristocratic fantasy. Devoid of jewels or elaborate clothing, the pastoral association inspired by Mariane's simple costume establishes her as the quintessential signifier of naturalized aristocratic, "feminine" beauty: "Elle n'étoit alors parée que d'elle-même" (49). Although Mariane's costume seemingly reinforces the valorization of aristocratic ideals, once again, our knowledge that she is cross-dressed does present a challenge to such standards. What does it mean for Mariane to be costumed as her (natural) self, that is, a self unadorned with jewels or make-up? Isn't her true identity always a disguise? By extension, can we understand that all identity is the product of artifice?

If Mariane's outfit poses a challenge to ideals of natural femininity, Prince Sionad's costume is a second instance of how cross-dressing complicates an easy understanding of the significance of feminine beauty ideals in this time. Prince Sionad (whose name is an anagram of Adonis, itself a coded reference to Philippe d'Orléans) has come to the ball in drag: "Le beau Prince Sionad s'y trouva sous des habits de Femme, pour disputer au beau Sexe, et remporter au jugement des Connoisseurs le prix de la souveraine beauté" (49). The Prince bows to young Mariane's beauty in yet another ironic plot twist, since unlike the reader, the Prince has no idea that Mariane is a man dressed as a woman exalting the features of natural feminine beauty. On a surface level, the prince's attempts to challenge the notion that beauty is the province where women fail. Given that the example of feminine beauty that forces him to cede defeat is none other than a cross-dressed man, we can conclude that transvestism is the vehicle that allows the author to question the assignment of beauty as the exclusive province of either men or women.

The real turning point in the story occurs one day at the theater when Mariane spies a man whose beauty matches her own "...elle

remarqua dans la loge voisine un jeune homme fort bien fait, avec un juste-au-corps d'écarlate, en broderie d'or et d'argent, mais ce qui luy donna plus d'attention, c'est qu'il avoit aux oreilles des boucles de diamans fort brillantes, et trois ou quatre mouches sur le visage" (50). Physically, the man is described almost in the same manner as Mariane, both have a fine complexion and curly hair, although he is brunette and she is blond. The primary trait they share is their beauty, external marker of their innate goodness.

The Comtesse's jealous disapproval of the young man, the Marquis de Bercour, reveals the traditional conception of beauty as a quality assigned to the feminine: "... il fait le beau, et cela ne sied point à un homme. Que ne s'habille-t-il en fille?" (50). The Comtesse's jealousy leads her to conclude that she would prefer the man to dress as a woman, rather than flout traditional social codes governing masculinity. When Mariane asks the young man why he wears earrings and beauty marks, his response suggests a society that is more willing to accept minor transgression of gender codes than the Comtesse's comment would imply: "Il répondit que c'estoit habitude, et qu'ayant eu les oreilles percées dès son enfance, il y avoit toujours mis des boucles de diamans, et qu'au reste on pardonneroit à son âge ces petits ajustemens, qui proprement ne conviennent qu'au beau Sexe" (51). It is important to emphasize that the young man's earrings are studded with diamonds. Whereas fashion dictates concerning men and jewelry varied, what is significant is that diamonds are a gem that connoted the ultimate character trait for any seventeenth-century person: *honnêteté*. The young man's diamonds testified to his nobility of character, perhaps the most significant attribute of a person's identity, regardless of sex. Indeed, Mariane is not daunted by the prospect that the young man's accessories may challenge traditional gender boundaries, for with regard to clothing these boundaries have become more fluid: "Tout vous sied bien, Monsieur ... vous pouvez mettre des mouches et des brasselets, sans que nous nous y opposions. Vous ne serez pas le premier, et les jeunes gens s'ajustent presentement comme les filles" (51). The Comtesse's objections to the Marquis are thus overruled, drawing out the traditional comic schema according to which young lovers must overcome obstacles presented by their elders. Fittingly for this story, the first obstacle thus appears to center upon bodily adornment.

Despite Mariane's acceptance of her lover's earrings and finery, upon his return from the hunt she tells him, "ne vous y trompez pas, nous vous aimons mieux avec une sangle, qu'avec des pendans d'oreilles" (53). Fairy tale heros and heroines often undergo tests of character, and this story is no exception. In the case of the Marquis, the hunt scene is one of two tests of masculinity, underscoring the importance of gender codes to the representation of identity. To prove his masculine valor, he fights a duel against a man described as a "beau, bien fait, brave, homme de guerre," a rival who believed the Marquis de Bercour "trop beau et trop effeminé pour oser mesurer son épée contre la sienne" (55). The threat of effeminacy is resolved by the Marquis's adept mastery of the sword, that age-old signifier of phallic power. As in the beginning of the story, masculinity is associated with militaristic vigor. Contrary to traditional fairy tales where such tests of valor are often the precursor to the marriage of the hero and heroine, although the Marquis wins his duel and has successfully won Mariane's heart, he does not want to marry. One of the most intriguing aspects of *L'Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* is this refusal of traditional heterosexual closure. He tells Mariane, "[l]e mariage est d'ordinaire la fin du plaisir" (55). The Marquis is no libertine, however, and he also tells Mariane that he is pleased with the current state of their physical relationship. In the absence of traditional marital closure, the unmasking of the transvestite disguise more clearly begins to drive the narrative.

Instead of blaming the Marquis for his constant refusal, Mariane holds her mother responsible for delaying the marriage. In showing how Mariane turns her anger on her mother and not on her lover, the tale highlights the way interactions between men and women in patriarchal society take precedence over the bonds between women. The mother's final recourse is to reveal the secret of Mariane's birth: "Oüy, mon Enfant, luy dit sa mere en l'embrassant, vous estes un Garçon, je vois combien cette nouvelle vous afflige. L'habitude a fait en vous une autre nature" (56). Mariane refuses to accept the truth of her biological sex on the basis of her feelings for the Marquis, her world-view denies the possibility of same-sex attraction: "Non, non, s'écria-t-elle, non, cela n'est pas possible, et si cela estoit vray je ne sentirois pas ce que je sens. La nature est sage et ses mouvements sont raisonnables" (57). To admit that she is biologically a man would require Mariane to valorize a homo-

sexual desire for the Marquis, a possibility that the story rejects. Mariane doesn't want to face that there is something the matter with her, that her matter might be cause for the Marquis' refusal to marry.

The next significant turning point in the story is the mother's sudden illness and subsequent death three days later, an allusion to the rapid demise of the mother figure in Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves*. Before dying, the widow entrusts her brother with Mariane's secret. Although the reader would expect that this man would react to the rather startling revelation with shock or moral condemnation, Mariane's uncle greets the news with joy, primarily because he understands that he and his children will be the financial beneficiaries of this bizarre situation. When Mariane finally convinces the Marquis to marry her, if only to satisfy social conventions, the uncle's support of the union is presented as further proof of his own self-interest: "Il voyait par là trente mille livres de rente assurées à sa Famille, et ne craignoit pas que sa Nièce eust des Enfants avec le Marquis de Bercour, au lieu que, ne se mariant pas, sa fantaisie d'estre Fille pouvoit changer avec l'âge, et avec la beauté, qui passeroit indubitablement" (59). According to the uncle's world view, considerations of sexual and gender identity are secondary to one's financial situation. The loss of a fortune concerns him more than sanctioning a match between two men. However, the uncle's intense association with monetary desire is a coded message to the readers that he should be discredited in their eyes. Money, although it was the means that enabled Mariane's mother to enact her plan in the first place, should not be valued as an end in itself. Thus the uncle's approval of the same-sex union puts this very relationship into question. If the uncle's view is to be discredited, that of which he approves should also be of no consequence.

On the actual wedding day, Marquis and Marquise, resplendent in their respective glory, appear to be the perfect fairy tale couple. That evening, however, we find the Marquis whimpering sadly in the far corner of their wedding bed, still showing no sexual interest in his wife. He finally reveals the reasons for his reluctance to marry: "je vous ay trompée, approchez et voyez. Il luy prit la main en même temps et la mit sur la plus belle gorge du monde. Vous voyez, ajoûta-t-il en fondant en larmes, vous voyez que je ne puis rien pour vous, puisque je suis Femme aussi bien que vous"

(60). No amount of social performance can mask the naked truth of the body. This revelation allows the Marquise to accept her own biological sex because it evacuates the masked threat of homosexual relations: "Elle ne douta plus dans ce moment qu'elle ne fust un Garçon, et se jettant entre les bras de son cher Marquis, elle lui causa la même surprise et la même joye" (60). Heterosexual desire is thus championed at the close of the tale, absorbing all anxiety that cross-dressing could have inspired. Even more so than gender, heterosexuality is destiny. Mariane will continue to live publicly as a woman and the Marquis de Bercour will live as a man, proudly performing their culturally acquired gender identity. As in traditional comic literature, the young couple overcome all obstacles at the end, and presumably will live happily ever after. The only person who suffers from this arrangement is the greedy uncle, who will be deprived of his presumed inheritance by his niece/nephew's progeny. Although there is no explicit moral to this tale, two French proverbs would indeed be appropriate: "l'argent ne fait pas le bonheur" and "l'habit ne fait pas le moine".

The conclusion of *L'Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* thus demonstrates that although the motif of transvestism is not necessarily subversive, it does inspire questions about early modern attitudes towards gender boundaries in education, sexual preference, as well as codes of masculinity and femininity. The underlying question of Mariane's true sex continually invites the reader to reflect upon the transvestite character's interaction with men and women and ultimately, the dual transvestite revelation in the story's conclusion safely evacuates any anxieties inspired by the immanence of same-sex eroticism. In this particular tale, the ultimate irony is the destabilization of the potentially subversive same-sex relation between Mariane and her Marquis. In concluding the tale with a topsy-turvy heterosexual marriage, the author of *L'Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* reinforces heterosexual norms in the service of the dominant patriarchal order. Despite the author's frequent use of irony, rhetorical manipulation that makes *L'Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* seem quite funny, studying the transvestite bodies in this tale is thus no laughing matter, but rather an invitation to question deeply rooted cultural anxieties about homosexuality.

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Notes

¹ See DeJean for an extensive treatment of the question of women writers and agency in seventeenth-century France. DeJean also discusses the history of galant literature in the chapter entitled "Divorce, Desire, and the Novel" (127-58).

² According to Roche-Mazon, this tale was originally published in the February 1695 *Mercure galant* under the title *Histoire de la MM de B* (21). However, Roche-Mazon frequently refers to the story as the *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville*, although in her anthology she lists the title simply as *La MM de B*. I will refer to the work by its longer title.

³ Van der Cruysse's extensive study, *L'Abbé de Choisy, androgyne et mandarin*, provides an invaluable and detailed information on the Abbé's biography.

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"That God Within:" Writing Female Genius from Diderot to Staël

Cecilia Feilla

A thin but significant line is traversed in the representation of female authorship between the depiction of Germaine de Staël at age twenty as the possessed "prêtresse la plus célèbre d'Apollon" (Staël's *Journals intimes* qtd. in Vallois 4) and that of Emily Brontë in 1851 as an author who "possesses the creative gift" (C. Brontë 40). One of the central figures to effect this change is, ironically, Staël herself. Her novel, *Corinne, ou, l'Italie* (1807) rescripts possession (both ownership and the proper) in important ways which negotiate a new place for female genius in the novel. What I pursue in this paper is how "genius" is constructed along gender lines at the moment it takes its modern introjected form as a natural gift in the late eighteenth century, and how the "inspiration," "prophecy" and "possession" which characterize genius take on a negative valence when applied to women writers, often emblemized as sibylline, and read as signs of hysteria. Is the woman writer possessed by genius (a transcendent figure) or does she possess genius (an immanent gift)? A close reading of *Corinne* in light of Denis Diderot's essay, *Sur les femmes* (1772), will reveal how gender marks the discourse of writing and genius, especially as it pertains to issues of style and female authorship.

Diderot wrote *Sur les femmes* as a reply to l'Abbé Antoine-Léonard Thomas's *Essai sur le caractère, les mœurs et l'esprit des femmes* (1772). A complex meditation on the "nature" of women and their potential for genius, Diderot's essay is also a reflection on writing and the exercise of style. From the first lines, Diderot establishes his authority on the subject of women by invoking his carnal knowledge of them. He explicitly links the lack of heterosexual activity in men with a lack of style in writing: Thomas, he claims, cannot write because he is celibate (251, 261-262), d'Alembert cannot because he is homosexual (262). Man distinguishes himself with style (Buffon's "Le style est l'homme même" [30]), and the subject fashioning this style is woman:

Thomas ne dit pas un mot des avantages du commerce des femmes pour un homme de lettres; et c'est un ingrat.... Elles nous accoutument encore à mettre de l'agrément et de la clarté dans les matières les plus sèches et les plus épineuses. On leur adresse sans cesse la parole; on veut en être écouté; on craint de les fatiguer ou de les ennuyer; et l'on prend une facilité particulière de s'exprimer qui passe de la conversation dans le style.... (*Sur les femmes* 261-262)

Diderot performs here a curious linking of style, authority, sex, and woman, ending with a notion of writing-the-female as defining an author. He manages to unite the rhetoric of possessing women sexually with the author's possession of style. The female body, in other words, is the medium through which man achieves his "voice," much the way in classical antiquity Apollo's prophecy is voiced through his priestess at Delphi. The female subject and female subjectivity become the means by which the male writer achieves his own style and glory.¹ If women provide *agrément*, *clarté* and *facilité* to men's writing, what do they bring to their own? Can the female body/style constitute anything on its own, without the mediation of men, or are women purely style without substance?

Where women afford men the passage "de la conversation dans le style," Diderot suggests that woman's conversation is her style. In his biography of Germaine de Staël, *Mme de Staël et la Suisse*, P. Kohler writes that "elle a mis le meilleur de son esprit et de son art dans ses paroles envolées. Ecrivant, elle causait encore..." (53). The woman author is presented as an artist of conversation whose *parole envolée* spills over into writing. Categories of sex are curiously enforced: a woman does not write; rather, she converses or chats. Her writing is merely a continuation of her idle or inspired chatter. Diderot further suggests that women authors write from feeling and not convention: "Elles sont rarement systématiques, toujours à la dictée du moment" (*Sur les femmes* 261).² Spontaneous and uncontrived, her writing is presented as a copia, an excess of language overflowing onto the page (a notion which suggests that this feminine, conversational style is a precursor of automatic or stream-of-consciousness writing, and marks the transformation of genius in the direction of modernity's *vie quotidienne*, as in Baudelaire's well-known quote, "la modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent" [553]).

Diderot's vision of writing as a necessarily gendered practice is based on the sex of the author or (in the case of men) the sex the author writes. Of Thomas and his *Essai* Diderot remarks: "Il a voulu que son livre ne fût d'aucun sexe; et il n'y a malheureusement que trop bien réussi. C'est un hermaphrodite" (*Sur les femmes* 251). Mme de Staël expresses a similar sexual segregation of writing in *De l'Allemagne*, but playfully inverts the notion that sex determines writing to suggest that writing may determine sex: "Les femmes cherchent à s'arranger comme un roman, et les hommes comme une histoire" (qtd. in Vallois 8). Gender here takes its form from the stylistic convention of genre, an elision of generic/gendered categories as they are internalized as a category of identity.

The heroine of Staël's *Corinne* is praised for her remarkable ease and wit in conversation, which extends into her art of improvisation. "We must certainly imagine," writes Madelyn Gutwirth of Staël, "there was some intent on her part to transmute her own conversational genius into Corinne's art, that of improvisation" (191). An art without preparation or reflection, improvisation is the inspired speech of a performer who speaks "à la dictée du moment." A description of the young Staël further illustrates the pervasiveness of this view of the female writer: "elle est la prêtresse la plus célèbre d'Apollon ... que de nuances dans les accents de sa voix! quel accord parfait entre la pensée et l'expression" (Count Hippolyte de Guilbert qtd. in Vallois 12). Staël's genius for conversation is depicted in terms of the possessed utterance of Apollo's priestess at Delphi, and is praiseworthy for the perfect unity of thought and bodily expression. When applied to writing, however, this conversational style is devalued, as in Buffon's *Discours sur le style*: "Ceux qui écrivent comme ils parlent, quoiqu'ils parlent très bien, écrivent mal" (21).³ Conversational writing is viewed as flowing without conscience, without reason, as if by accident. "Si nous disons quelque chose de bien, c'est comme des fous ou des inspirés, par hasard," laments Rameau's nephew ironically. "Il n'y a que vous autres qui vous entendiez" (Diderot, *Neveu* 20). Apparently only men of letters can have genius and self-presence, achieving their style through knowledge and intellect; lunatics and women, on the other hand, produce "par hasard." It is furthermore for "vous autres" to determine the meaning of the latter's utterance, the value of their art, much the way exegeti existed to interpret the sibylline prophecies.

"Jamais un homme ne s'est assis, à Delphes, sur le sacré trépied," Diderot writes in *Sur les femmes*.

Le rôle de Pythie ne convient qu'à une femme. Il n'y a qu'une tête de femme qui puisse s'exalter au point de pressentir sérieusement l'approche d'un dieu, de s'agiter, de s'écheveler, d'écumer, de s'écrier: *Je le sens, je le sens, le voilà le dieu*, et d'en trouver le vrai discours. (252-253)

Diderot casts woman into the sublime because, he says, she is without measure ("s'étend sans mesure" [252]) and without reason. Woman is so different from man ("organisé[e] tout au contraire de nous" [252]) that there is nothing but difference, an idea which recalls Rousseau's claim in book five of *Emile* that woman's sexuality is everything in her and thus she shares nothing with man. Woman alone has the capacity to feel the coming of a god, an oracle which speaks through her, and which she serves with her body.

The words, "*Je le sens, je le sens, le voilà le dieu*," quoted by Diderot in the passage above, are those spoken by the Sibyl in book six of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Like the ancients he invokes, Diderot locates the capacity to receive divination in the womb:

La femme porte au-dedans d'elle-même un organe susceptible de spasmes terribles, disposant d'elle, et suscitant dans son imagination des fantômes de toute espèce. C'est dans le délire hystérique qu'elle revient sur le passé, qu'elle s'élance dans l'avenir, que tous les temps lui sont présents. C'est de l'organe propre à son sexe que partent toutes ses idées extraordinaires.... Rien de plus contigu que l'extase, la vision, la prophétie, la révélation, la poésie fougueuse et l'hystérisme. (*Sur les femmes* 255)

The uterus is the source of prophetic ecstasy and poetic creation, and thus allows women a capacity for discursive insight not accessible to men. This feminine capacity, however, is marked by malady: *le délire hystérique*. Hysteria, as early as Hippocrates, was thought to be the result of "the wandering womb" which traveled within the female body. Attributed to supernatural causes and associated with witchcraft and possession in the Middle Ages, hysteria was later viewed in the Renaissance as a physical, rather than spiritual, condition. During the Enlightenment, hysteria became known as a disorder of the nervous system rather than the

uterus, and remained so throughout the nineteenth century.⁴ Although Diderot was informed by medical experts of his time who refuted Hippocratic myths, he and his contemporaries continued to look upon hysterical manifestations with fascination and fear. "La femme dominée par l'hystérisme éprouve je ne sais quoi d'inférieur ou de céleste," he writes in *Sur les femmes*. "Quelquefois, elle m'a fait frissonner. C'est dans la fureur de la bête féroce qui fait partie d'elle-même que, je l'ai vue, que je l'ai entendue. Comme elle sentait! comme elle s'exprimait! Ce qu'elle disait n'était point d'une mortelle" (256). This ecstasy, either religious or poetic, leads to a decentered utterance which propulses her outside of herself, and outside of the human.⁵ Beast or angel, woman's utterance is viewed as an irrational and uncontrolled outburst of language, somewhere between the grotesque and the sublime.⁶ A pointed critique of the excessive religious lifestyle wherein certain privations lead to these hysteric states, Diderot indicates Mme de Guillon [Guyon] and Saint Teresa of Avila, two women renowned for their ecstatic visions, as models of female genius. For these women, the womb does not create children, rather it creates phantoms which haunt and inhabit them (a notion which recalls the line in Mary Shelley's preface to *Frankenstein*, "I could not so easily get rid of my phantom; still it haunted me" [9]). The poet and mystic are joined by their transports and cast into the sublime as that which exceeds or transgresses (as lack or excess) the borders of the rational. Woman is the bookend that constitutes male reason without being constituted by it herself.

Diderot's discussion of female genius/hysteria presupposes as its horizon a fixed view of both reason and masculinity. The Enlightenment order, which links women to superstition and irrationality, articulates femininity—and more specifically, female sexuality—as aberrant and, at times, inhuman.⁷ Women are situated outside, or at the extremes of, male reason and are thus either excluded from any potential for genius (this is Rousseau's claim that "les femmes ... n'ont aucun génie" in his *Lettre à M. d'Alembert sur les spectacles* [247n2]) or their potential for genius is defined as different (and necessarily so in view of woman's maternal role). And yet Diderot concedes to say that when women have genius, it is more original than in men ("Quand elles ont du génie, je leur en crois l'empreinte plus originale qu'en nous" [*Sur les femmes* 262]). Women are capable of either hysteria or pure poetic

genius, the two polar ends of reason, and of little, if anything, in between. This pervasive gendering of the possibilities of and for genius informs the portrayal of women writers, real and fictional, from the late eighteenth century onward. It will be useful at this point to take a cursory look at the classical sources to which Diderot and Staël allude in their representations of the woman of genius.

The philosophical theory of inspiration took two divergent paths in the ancient world: prophetic utterance was held to come either from the soul of the ecstatic raised to abnormal powers or from a wholly different personality which had temporarily possessed the soul of the ecstatic, and spoken through his or her lips. Although the ancients accepted this possibility of divine inspiration, they also recognized that what appeared to be divination could merely be the manifestations of insanity. In his essay entitled *The Sacred Disease*—written at the height of rationalism in fifth-century Athens—Hippocrates berates the ignorant and often profit-motivated practice of passing mental disease off as prophecy. He couples inspiration with its look-alike, madness, and presents it in opposition to reason, science and the established order (Bevan 138-139). In Plato's *Ion*, Socrates discusses poetic inspiration in similar terms when he says that poets and their interpreters are "not in their senses," but "a poet is ... never able to compose until he has become inspired, and is beside himself, and reason is no longer in him" (533e). He disputes the possibility of poetry being art because art, he says, is not dependent upon the emotions but belongs to the realm of knowledge. Poetry on the other hand is inspiration, not knowledge. "We call it being 'possessed'" (536a). Some of the Greek words used to connote a state of possession, *epipnoi* and *ekstasis*, also indicate a state of madness or folly. A familiar topos, one Diderot invokes in *Le Neveu de Rameau* ("les hommes de génie sont communément singuliers, ou comme dit le proverbe, qu'il n'y a point de grand esprit sans un grain de folie" [18]), the link of genius and folly becomes central to the representation of female genius as aberrant or hysterical (in the sense of possession rather than self-possession). It is significant, for instance, that Hippocrates was also the first to coin the term *hysteria*, a word which locates the source of disease in the womb, or *hys*. Edward Bevan explains in *Sibyls and Seers* that "the principal material means by which the oracular ecstasy at Delphi was believed by the Greeks to be

induced was a kind of gas or vapour which, it was asserted, rose from a fissure in the ground beneath the Pythia and entered her womb" (157).⁸ The womb is thus the organ of the Sibyl's prophetic powers. It is not only the receptacle of divination ("le vrai discours") which leads to inspired discourse—either spoken or written verse (usually Greek hexameter!)—but is also the potential source of disease, hysteria.

The words of Virgil's Sibyl, which Diderot cites in *Sur les femmes*, occur in the sixth book of the *Aeneid* when the Cumaen Sibyl foretells Aeneas's future: first she senses the god approaching, "Deus, ecce deus!" (6.46), then as he nears, she falls into a paroxysm. The Sibyl struggles against the god in an agonized effort to rid herself of him. "The prophetess, not yet able to endure Apollo, raves in the cavern, swollen in stature, striving to throw off the God from her breast; he all the more exercises her frenzied mouth, quelling her wild heart, and fashions her by pressure" (6.77-80). The extremely violent and sexual nature of the possession in this passage is remarkable, not only because the Sibyl is the property of the god, relegated to his shrine to use as he likes, but because the god's physical presence inside her body (in the form of a vapor that enters her vagina and lodges in the womb) has the quality of penetration and insemination, if not rape. The Sibyl is presented as a vanquished animal, molded by the force of a god who animates her body. Yet what is also notable is that the Sibyl retains her consciousness separate from Apollo's throughout. Like Cassandra, she is inspired and possessed by the god, but not completely one with him.⁹

The sexual valence is also present in other versions of the tale from antiquity. In Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, for instance, the Sibyl explains to Aeneas that, though she is not a goddess, she has been offered immortality if she yields her virginity to Apollo. The god uses her body for oracles yet, because she refuses him, she remains a virgin. Similarly, Cassandra learns the secrets of prophecy from Apollo because he is attracted by her beauty. However, because she rejects his advances, he lays upon her the curse that her prophecies will never be believed. Thus the price she pays for her chastity is the appearance of madness, and he retains access to her body (14.130). Spiritual and physical possession are thus nearly allied in the classical tradition; the one is often associated and portrayed in terms of the other. The pervasively sexual nature of

the dynamic draws our attention to two issues in regard to later representations of, and allusions to, the Sibyl: the classical model presents the female body as vehicle for male writing, and portrays prophetic ecstasy in terms of sexual possession and sexual ecstasy.

For Diderot, genius is not characterized by divine inspiration or any other supernatural cause; rather, for him it is natural, a "gift of nature," a conception which differs significantly from Plato's notion of *daimonion*. In the Greek context, Hesiodic daimones are essentially spirits mediating between gods and men. Following the Greek sources, Roman religion posits that every man has a genius, or a guardian spirit, who has charge of his destiny. Ken Frieden informs us in *Genius and Monologue* that until the mid-eighteenth century "genius" runs parallel to the German *Geist* and retains traces of its Latin heritage: all individuals are believed to have a genius (spirit or mind) of some sort (66).¹⁰ Beginning in the 1750s, however, an outpouring of theoretical writings suggests that the inspired person need not have a genius but rather has genius or is a genius. Mythical ideas of genius as the mediator between gods and men, *daimon*, cede in the eighteenth century to the popular call for original creation. Although artistic invention is seen as displacing divine inspiration at this time, transcendent ideas continue to guide the modern notions of genius. Ancient mythology, as Frieden suggests, has not disappeared but has been turned inward. The Enlightenment contested all figures of manifest divinity, but nonetheless retained its tropes. This internalization of mythological figures is evident in expressions like that of British writer, Edward Young, who described genius as "that god within" (qtd. in Frieden 66). Genius no longer descends to man but rises within him. It appears as both transcendent and immanent spirit by virtue of the fact that the internalization of tropes transforms the mythical figure of genius (Roman divinity) into a category of modern psychology. What Frieden fails to address, however, is the fact that genius is also gendered at this transformational moment. The mythical figure associated with female genius, the Sibyl, is internalized, or introjected, as a category of modern female psychology and pathology. The discursive mark of this internalization, as we have seen above, is conversation and the conversational style associated with women's writing.¹¹

The interiorization and psychologization of classical tropes of genius is explicitly performed in Madame de Staël's novel *Corinne*,

considered "*the book of the woman genius*." (Ellen Moers qtd. in Heller 213). *Corinne* presents the defeat of a woman of genius by the restrictive forces of narrow social convention and expectation. *Corinne* differs, however, from standard plots in which an individual's potential is thwarted by social constraint because the eponymous heroine has already fulfilled her genius when the book opens: the reader first encounters Corinne as she is being crowned poet laureate at the Capitol in Rome. What is striking in the first description of Staël's heroine is the allusions to classical Greek mythology: "Elle étoit vêtue comme la sibylle du Dominiquin ... elle donnoit à la fois l'idée d'une prêtresse d'Apollon, qui s'avançoit vers le temple du Soleil" (1:45-46).¹² It is not by chance that Staël's heroine evokes the image of an inspired and possessed woman. A footnote in the Goldberger translation informs us that when improvisatrices like Corinne performed, it was believed "a god was in them and spoke through them" (421n1). It is fruitful to consider Corinne—the oracular woman, "la sibylle triomphante" (*Corinne* 1:47), inhabited by external voices—as an allegory for Staël's own performance as a writer. Indeed Staël identified herself with the figure of the Sibyl when she represented the woman of genius, Corinne, as sibylline. In the frontispiece to the 1844 *Œuvres Complètes*, after a painting by François Gérard, Staël is portrayed in the guise of Domenicho's sibyl. Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun's portrait of her as Corinne also takes as its model Domenicho's sibyl.

The oracular overtones bring to mind the writing strategies of French feminism: the poetic language of Kristeva, the *parler-femme* of Luce Irigaray and the *écriture féminine* of Cixous. The *écrivaine*, as oracle or diviner, voices feminine experiences relegated by patriarchy to the margins of discourse. Writing is a medium in both senses of the term: an encoded method of communication and a conduit through which "unincorporated" voices may speak. The *écrivaine* can elude patriarchal discourse through a process that echos oracular ecstasy: proceeding from a sublimation of the ego, followed by an attentiveness to the erotic rhythms of the unconscious. Cixous remarks (in a way that echos Shelley and Brontë) that "what is going to write itself comes from long before me, me [moi] being nothing but the bodily medium which formalizes and transcribes that which is dictated to me" (qtd. in Conley 146). She does not take personal credit for her *écriture*, but admits her debt to some oneiric voice outside herself. The source of this voice,

Cixous claims, is the voice of the ideal mother. Cixous suggests that the *écrivaine* assumes the role of spokesperson for this maternal voice in order to become like a sibyl. Certainly it is when Corinne reclaims her "mother tongue" that her artistic voice flourishes. Despite its essentialist claims for an *écriture féminine*, Cixous's approach raises the interesting questions of maternal legacy and the female author's relationship to the patriarchal order. It is interesting to note that, historically, the sibyls were "safely officialized" by the government of ancient Greece. "Oracular inspiration was canalized," explains Bevan, "for the Greek states, at the great shrines" (137). The oracular seat was regulated by the state and served as the vehicle of ideological reproduction. Marginalized and aberrant as the sibyl's oracles were, they were never outside the dominant discourse they reproduced. What this suggests is that the oracular writing of the "maternal voice" cannot in fact elude patriarchal discourse, as Cixous avers, but is a marginal voice always already regulated by it. Moreover, the "maternal voice" she describes can itself be seen as the internalized trope of the Sibyl inherited from Enlightenment discourse on female genius: "that god[dess] within" which dictates a writing. The task at hand is to reveal how this internalized mythological figure is rewritten, how possession is rescripted in *Corinne* and how Staël thereby negotiates a crucial place for women within the writing of genius.

The voyage of Oswald and Corinne to Naples, and their excursion to the edge of Vesuvius, recalls that of Aeneas, who, accompanied by the Cumaen prophetess, descends into Hell. The "Improvisation de Corinne dans la Campagne de Naples" explicitly invokes the Virgilian myth: "La ville de Cumes, l'ancre de la Sybille, le temple d'Apollon, étoient sur cette hauteur. Voici le bois où fut cueilli le rameau d'or. La terre de l'Énéide vous entoure; et les fictions consacrées par le génie, sont devenues des souvenirs dont on cherche encore les traces" (2:72). Her language gestures toward an internalizing of fictions mediated by genius, similar to Frieden's discussion of the introjection of mythological figures into modern psychology. Furthermore, the similarity of Oswald and Aeneas's quest goes deeper than first appears: Aeneas descends into Hell in order to seek the counsel of his father and learns that his only option is to leave Dido. In *Corinne*, it is also at the edge of the volcano that Oswald remembers his father's words of

wisdom and decides to leave Corinne. The difference here is that Corinne, as Deborah Heller has pointed out, is both the sibyl that guides Oswald to his father and the lover he must abandon.¹³ By making her both Sibyl and Dido, Staël expands the definition of the woman of genius to include both the public role of Sibyl and the romantic heroine, both duty and love. Corinne's many negotiations of public and private spheres throughout the novel entail a necessary conflict of two rights, of two inherited but irreconcilable traditions. The reader is confronted with the conflict between Corinne's increasing dependence on Oswald and the necessary independence of spirit required for her artistic creativity. This latter conflict is in part formulated along national lines. Corinne needs the freedom and public acclaim afforded her in Italy in order to be creative.

The linking of genius and nation—already present in the title, *Corinne, ou, l'Italie*—was a convention current in Staël's day. The notion that context determines identity and possibility, that genius is dependent on socio-historical circumstances, is a reiteration of Diderot's discussion of genius in *Le Neveu de Rameau*. Diderot, similar to Machiavelli, argues that a particular age produces genius by providing favorable conditions for its flowering. In turn, "les hommes de génie ... feront l'honneur des peuples chez lesquels ils auront existé" (Diderot, *Neveu* 18). This is certainly true of Corinne, of whom Prince Castel-Forte says, "[n]ous sommes fiers de son génie; nous disons aux étrangers: 'Regardez-la, c'est l'image de notre belle Italie'" (1:52). The fact that she is a woman, however, problematizes the formulation. England is presented as the land of patriarchy, a country "où les institutions politiques donnent aux hommes des occasions honorables d'agir et de se montrer," but where "les femmes doivent rester dans l'ombre" (*Corinne* 2:184). Corinne cannot live happily in England because, as Diderot explains, men and women of genius "ne savent ce que c'est d'être citoyens, pères, mères, frères, parents, amis" (*Neveu* 16). Italy represents the "nation libérale, qui ne banisse point les femmes de son temple ... vous qui toujours applaudissez à l'essor du génie" (*Corinne* 2:298); its topology of ruins symbolizes a patriarchy in ruins. The very possibility of Corinne's living a life in the public eye is dependent on her renunciation of the father's name, the paternal home and the fatherland.

The necessary link of Corinne's genius with Italy is made explicit in the letter Oswald's father addresses to her father regarding the marriage of their children: "[D]e talents si rares doivent nécessairement exciter le désir de les développer ... elle entraîneroit nécessairement mon fils hors de l'Angleterre, car une telle femme ne peut y être heureuse; et l'Italie seule lui convient" (2:184). There is a marked fatality in the utter irreconcilability of her love for Oswald (and the fact that Corinne has never found love with an Italian). Like Aeneas, Oswald chooses duty over love, yet this duty also includes the romantic love he feels for Lucille. Corinne, too, chooses filial duty when she asks for "la bénédiction paternelle" for Lucille and herself: "[E]xaucez-la, mon père, et pour l'autre de vos enfans, une mort douce et tranquille" (2:219). This choice of duty allows Corinne to acquiesce to the paternal order at the same time that she excludes herself from it. Corinne rewrites the binaries to accomodate her problematic position in society, it suggests that women, and specifically the woman of genius, cannot be contained within the boundaries erected by male society. The woman of genius represents a destabilizing force, an excess that spills over: a characterization we have encountered in Diderot's *Sur les femmes*.¹⁴ Like her literary forebear, the Princesse de Clèves, Corinne foresees no hope in marriage to Oswald, nor happiness from her art alone, and thus withdraws from society, from marriage, and ultimately from life. She resists circulation within the male economy—"resist[s] possession," to recall Nancy Miller's expression—in order to come into self-possession, in order to avoid continued mediation through her relation to men (42).

Corinne enacts a further rewriting of genius in the final scenes of the novel in which she passes on her talents to Juliette, her sister's daughter with Oswald. Although Corinne has ceased to perform her improvisations, her voice is passed on: the repressed maternal legacy continues in Juliette: "La pauvre Corinne, dans son état de foiblesse et de dépérissement, se donnoit une peine extrême pour l'instruire et lui communiquer tous ses talens comme un héritage qu'elle se plaisoit à lui léguer de son vivant" (2:292). Corinne teaches Juliette to nurture "tous ses talens"—lute-playing, singing, and Italian (the mother tongue)—thereby keeping the memory of Corinne alive to Oswald. Corinne acts the part of a classical Roman genius, a tutelary spirit, who has the destiny of Juliette (and Oswald) in her hands. Although it is a tempered form

of genius she passes on—in which pleasing is key—the crux of the transformation is in the nature of the legacy. Most of what passes between Juliette and Corinne occurs behind closed doors (a space coded as feminine) and outside the narrative space. Like a sibyl emitting mysterious messages, Corinne's legacy is constructed as an abundant and unstoppable excess that, not contained by death, must be passed on. Akin to the conversational style of women writers, Corinne's heritage reflects a verbal, somatic form of "writing" which affords the passage from conversation into the conversational style (improvisation)—"de la conversation dans le style conversationnel" (Diderot, *Sur les femmes* 262). The medium for this writing of the feminine legacy is Juliette's body.

Where Diderot claims that woman is always possessed—by lovers, natural powers, or by supernatural powers—Staël here presents the woman of genius as self-possessed. Staël undermines the essentializing discourse of the Enlightenment, and of French feminism, and opens the way for an understanding of female authorship and genius that is not limited by myths of the natural. Through a consideration of the classical and pathological discourses inflecting eighteenth-century writing on genius, we can see how genius is constructed along gender lines at the moment it takes its modern introjected form as a gift of nature. The conversational style Staël embodies reflects this introjection of classical myth, as it rewrites it; it also points to a transformation of genius in the direction of modernity.

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Notes

¹ Richardson and Marivaux reestablished male authority and authorship in the novel by writing as women. Female subjectivity and authorship, in the character of the writing woman (such as Pamela, Clarissa or the Marianne), is a male construction, a character created by male writing.

² In *Sur les femmes* Diderot speaks of male conventionality as substantive, a history of thought that builds upon itself over time. Women are deemed incapable of this, as they are "toujours à la dictée du moment" (261). I argue that Staël's conversational style is substantive and follows/

creates certain discursive conventions (and thus has both a history and a future).

³ Buffon's notion that "[l]es idées seules forment le fond du style" (28) further corroborates Diderot's claim that woman lacks style because she lacks reason.

⁴ Sources for the history of hysteria include Logan and Veith.

⁵ According to Diderot, the female orgasm wanders through the woman's body ("elle s'égare"), but is not expelled. It is epileptic, phantom-like, excessive; it also reflects the "wandering womb" of hysteria.

⁶ The aesthetic categories Diderot presents suggest the uncanny.

⁷ Diderot links women to the hysterical fury of revolutionary masses, grafting his gender anxiety onto class instability. He associates men, on the other hand, with the *peuple*, the organized and military corps. He furthermore appeals to the figure of woman as contagion and metonymy: "Les femmes sont sujettes à une férocité épidémique: l'exemple d'une seule entraîne une multitude; il n'y a que la première qui soit criminelle, les autres sont malades" (*Sur les femmes* 257). It is not surprising, within such a rhetoric of pathology, that the only one to calm woman successfully is the physician: "Cette imagination fougueuse, cet esprit qu'on croirait incoercible, un mot suffit pour l'abattre. Un médecin dit aux femmes de Bordeaux, tourmentées de vapeurs effrayantes, qu'elles sont menacées du mal caduc; et les voilà guéries. Un médecin secoue un fer ardent aux yeux d'une troupe de jeunes filles épileptiques; et les voilà guéries" (*Sur les femmes* 257). The physician represents science and morality, the new figure of authority. The treatment of hysteria anterior to Freud's studies was already being articulated as the triumph of secular reason over superstition.

⁸ Bevan refers to John Chrysostom in I Corinthians 34. The induction of the ecstatic state was commonly believed to be triggered by the entrance of some material object into the body, as when the spirit of Bacchus possesses us through the drinking of wine. Plato also sought a physiological theory for inspiration in his *Timaeus* in which he locates the seat of divination in the liver, the lower appetitive part of the soul: "God has given the art of divination not to the wisdom, but to the foolishness of man. No man, when in his wits, attains prophetic truth and inspiration, but when he receives the inspired word, either his intelligence is enthralled in sleep or he is demented by some distemper or possession" (71a-72b). Plato associates inspiration with a purely physical state and thus devoid of reason. I argue that when the choice of organ is gender-specific, it automatically becomes a vehicle for ideology.

⁹ Bevan and Dronke are my sources for the ancient perceptions of sibyls.

¹⁰ Frieden's insightful discussion of genius informs this piece throughout, especially the etymological transformation of genius from Greek to modern culture.

¹¹ This can be related to the "talking cure," Freud's psychoanalytic method for treating hysteria.

¹² Page references to Staël's *Corinne* refer to the French edition in the Works Cited. Also of interest in the first description of *Corinne* is the use of *encens*, a French term meaning both flattery and incense. "Elle reçoit l'encens de tout le monde, mais elle n'accepte à personne une préférence décidée" (44). *Corinne* is inspired by the regard and praise, *l'encens*, of her public rather than by the odorous vapor, *l'encens*, associated with the Pythia. The role of the inspired woman is motivated in her case by *amour-propre* and glory rather than duty to a male divinity.

¹³ Heller discusses *Corinne*'s dilemma in terms of two inherited but irreconcilable literary traditions, romance and epic.

¹⁴ In *Sur les femmes*, women are presented as not honoring social lines, moving back and forth across these borders as the situation changes: "Dans les temps de révolution, la curiosité les prostitue aux chefs de parti" (253).

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Beauty and Borderlands in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*

Lena Udall

Ce roman, ce conte, ce tableau, cette rêverie continuée avec l'obstination d'un peintre, cette espèce d'hymne à la Beauté, avait surtout ce grand résultat d'établir définitivement la condition génératrice des œuvres d'art, c'est-à-dire l'amour exclusif du Beau, l'*Idée fixe*.

Baudelaire, "Théophile Gautier"

"[E]tes-vous amoureux d'une madone ou d'une Diane?—votre idéal est-il un ange, une sylphide ou une femme? Hélas! c'est un peu de tout cela, et ce n'est pas cela," writes Théophile Gautier's narrator/protagonist, d'Albert, in *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (82). Conditioned by the romantics, Gautier's dream of ideal beauty proceeds from a transcendent desire: "Qui que tu sois, ange ou démon, ... toi que je ne connais pas et que j'aime!" (80).¹ Both Gautier and d'Albert are in search of an abstract ideal beauty that they sense, but cannot find in their own sphere. Nevertheless, d'Albert writes that "[r]ien n'est fatigant au monde comme ces tourbillons sans motif et ces élans sans but" (63). As a result, the soul's quest is modified by exterior beauty which Gautier finds in classical statuary, the surface of painting, or in the physical beauty of a woman. Gautier's vision of beauty therefore occupies the border between the eternal and the fugitive, the material and the abstract. The art that he creates responds to the perpetual war between his soul and his body: the irony of the real in the face of the ideal, of reality juxtaposed with dream, can only be tempered by art—or artifice. Overcoming the rift between these two poles, art makes present, or "represents," the ideal to the point where dream and reality are no longer separate entities.

Double amour, the subtitle given to the first editions of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, describes the art of erotic love as well as a love of aesthetics. The conjunction of these two devotions is displayed by Gautier's theory of *la transposition de l'art*, which not only reveals his explicit attempt to transpose static art into temporal

prose, but also implies a fundamental ambiguity of gender and genre. Contradictions and ambiguity structure the text of *Madeleine de Maupin*. Its genre, for instance, displays letter format, dramatic dialogue, and an outside narrator who arranges the letters, provides personal commentary and acts at times omnisciently. He interrupts in chapter six, for example, writing,

Encet endroit, si le débonnaire lecteur veut bien nous le permettre, nous allons pour quelque temps abandonner à ses rêveries le digne personnage [d'Albert] qui, jusqu'ici, a occupé la scène à lui tout seul et parlé pour son propre compte, et rentrer dans la forme ordinaire du roman, sans toutefois nous interdire de prendre par la suite la forme dramatique, s'il en est besoin, et en nous réservant le droit de puiser encore dans cette espèce de confession épistolaire que le susdit jeune homme adressait à son ami (161)

The story itself, deferred in narrative sequence after a long series of letters by the poet d'Albert to his friend Silvio, begins midway through the novel with Madeleine de Maupin's letters written to her confidante in which she recounts her adventures disguised as young Théodore de Sérannes. One might question the reasons for such an organization of the letters: it produces the effect of oscillation between what is real and imagined, intensifies the desire for information regarding Madeleine/Théodore's sex, and puts into question the terms "space" and "time." Such an arrangement would satisfy d'Albert, who writes: "Je ressemble assez ... à ces gens qui prennent le roman par la queue.... Cette manière de lire et d'aimer a son charme.... le renversement amène l'imprévu" (70).

The key to the success of the plot is based upon a gender twist in a love triangle between the poet chevalier d'Albert, Rosette, and Madeleine/Théodore. In chapter twelve, thematically the beginning of the atypical love story, Madeleine/Théodore has just been introduced to the widow Rosette who immediately takes an interest in the masked woman. Their relationship develops to the extent that Madeleine/Théodore, who wishes to maintain her virile disguise, departs, leaving Rosette to become in time the mistress of d'Albert. When Madeleine/Théodore returns to Rosette's home, rekindling the widow's amorous affections for the personage she believes to be a man, s/he captures d'Albert's attention by his/her

exquisite features which the poet would like to classify as womanly. Although they could boast of an amiable affair, Rosette and d'Albert forget each other in their pursuit of the Beauty.

The relationship between gender and genre implicit in the structure and themes of this novel is key. W.J.T. Mitchell asserts that "[t]he decorum of the arts at bottom has to do with proper sex roles" and that the laws of genre correspond to the laws of gender. Masculine gender relates to poetry, time, and to the mind while femininity is designated by painting, space and the body (*Iconology* 109-110). Movement between gender polarities and identities such as subject and object therefore corresponds to the binaries of genre involving text and image, and by extension to the oscillation between life and death, reality and fiction. These elements are not only put into play at the level of Madeleine's body, but also in the reenactment of Shakespeare's play *As You Like It* (in which Madeleine plays the part of Rosalinde), and especially in the tapestry which reflects Madeleine's ideal beauty.

While critics such as Dällenbach have treated the play as a *mise en abyme*, they have failed to give attention to the *mise en abyme* presented by the tapestry. The consideration of this structural element has heretofore been inadequate because the play itself does not recognize the movement of static and temporal binaries which the tapestry promotes. Looking at the tapestry in conjunction with Madeleine's body helps to clarify Gautier's entire aesthetic: both offer a "vérité de convention et d'optique" (252) and are regarded as works of art theorized as both static and temporal. As angel and woman, Madonna and Diana, Théodore/Madeleine becomes the *beau rêve réel*.

Madeleine's feminine voice relates directly to the art object, an *image* such as that of the tapestry, while d'Albert's masculine voice translates into the *temporality* revealed in the production of the play *As You Like It*. The tapestry serves as a mirror which (spatially) reflects and (temporally) sets the stage for d'Albert's rendition of aesthetic beauty. Stressing the importance of the role of Madeleine's narrative reinforces the type of aesthetic ideal that Gautier wishes to demonstrate by the image of the tapestry. It designates the importance of the transposition of art by means of combining feminine voice and masculine voice into a supreme work of art. We see the likeness between Madeleine/Théodore's and d'Albert's

aesthetic attractions, for instance, in the following meditations. Of the tapestry, Madeleine writes:

De grands arbres à feuilles aiguës y soutenaient des essaims d'oiseaux fantastiques ; les couleurs altérées par le temps produisaient de bizarres transpositions de nuances ; le ciel était vert, les arbres bleu de roi ... les chairs ressemblaient à du bois, et les nymphes ... avaient l'air de momies démaillotées ; leur bouche seule, dont la pourpre avait conservé sa teinte primitive, souriait avec une apparence de vie. (286)

D'Albert's description of the only type of theater which he likes is strikingly similar:

Les décorations ne ressemblent à aucune décoration connue ; ... tout y est peint de couleurs bizarres et singulières : la cendre verte, la cendre bleue ... les lacques jaunes et rouges y sont prodigués.... Les personnages ne sont d'aucun temps ni d'aucun pays.... Leurs habits sont les plus extravagants et les plus fantasques du monde.... En lisant cette pièce étrange, on se sent transporté dans un monde inconnu, dont on a pourtant quelque vague réminiscence ; on ne sait plus si l'on est mort ou vivant, si l'on rêve ou si l'on veille.... (243-247)

These musings are reproduced throughout the novel on a variety of levels and to varying degrees. But the significant aesthetic moment for my analysis remains that of the sighting and citing² of the tapestry (found in chapter twelve) as a locus of descriptive and narrative function.

As the structure and weave of the tapestry indicate, there is a constant and necessary intertextual relation between two differing elements—such as image and text, subject and object—which co-exist in a criss-cross manner. Such a weave symbolically mirrors the visuality set up by the tapestry and the discursive nature of the protagonists' letters: static and temporal art are brought together in the structure of this tapestry. Undeniably, image (the static classical ideal) and text (the temporal romantic ideal) converge at the level of the tapestry and Madeleine's body. Moreover, the *glissement* of one pole to the other—of other and same, illusion and reality—occurs due to this tapestry's function as a *mise en abyme*. A type of mirror, the tapestry then reveals or re-presents a hidden history/story (*histoire*).

Because of the nature of the *mise en abyme*, which is not only an indicator of what has happened but of what is yet to come, past and future come together in the present; dream and illusion become a type of reality. As Dällenbach writes, the *mise en abyme* causes a "blurring of the demarcation between within and without in order to produce a vacillation in the categorization of the fictive and the real" (37). The past is settled, clear, and sterile; the future involves instability, uncertainty, and excitement. Yet we are never quite in either past or future, for as Gautier states in his preface, "c'est toujours aujourd'hui" (34). Juxtaposing image and text enables Gautier to displace the past and the future into an eternal present in which they become dream-like realities.

The aesthetic premises put into *abyme* in the tapestry will show Madeleine to occupy the same space/time dichotomy as the descriptive/narrative function of this image.

Jé te parle longuement de cette tapisserie, plus longuement à coup sûr que cela n'en vaut la peine ; — mais c'est une chose qui m'a toujours étrangement préoccupée, que ce monde fantastique créé par les ouvriers de haute lisse. J'aime passionnément cette végétation *imaginaire*, ces fleurs et ces plantes qui n'existent pas dans la réalité.... Lorsque j'étais petite, je n'entrais guère dans une chambre tapissée sans éprouver une espèce de frisson, et j'osais à peine m'y remuer. Toutes ces figures debout contre la muraille, et auxquelles *l'ondulation de l'étoffe et le jeu de la lumière* prêtent une espèce de *vie fantastique*, me semblaient autant d'espions occupés à surveiller mes actions pour en rendre compte en temps et lieu, et je n'eusse pas mangé une pomme ou un gâteau volé en leur présence. Que de choses ces graves personnages auraient à dire, s'ils pouvaient ouvrir leurs lèvres de fil rouge.... De combien de ... monstruosité de toutes sortes ne sont-ils pas les *silencieux et impassibles témoins!* (287-288; emphasis added)

The claim that these silent witnesses, unable to open their mouths made of red yarn, cannot openly testify to secret occurrences of the past can be refuted, for we are led to consider Madeleine's testimony concerning the tapestry she encounters during her *travestissement*: interestingly, these mouths do smile with the signs of life while all else remains inanimate. As Madeleine gazes at the tapestry in question, which reproduces the effects of the tapestries of her childhood, she simultaneously experiences a certain fear of

its alterity and a seductive attraction to its forms, colors and movements. She has the sensation of a past which she does not know and cannot decipher, which nonetheless becomes part of her experience as she becomes a figure of its historical experience. Madeleine's interest in the *monde fantastique* involves the desire for illusion and dream mingled with reality; her longing to penetrate this other world, intertwined with a fascinated fear, characterizes Gautier's borderland of beauty.

As a *subject* gazing at the *object* of art, Madeleine need not fear. Only when she desires to cross the limits and the space between herself and the tapestry in order to live its wonders and discover its secrets is her subjectivity put into question, for she no longer plays the active role. Rather, the figures in the tapestry are gazing at her. The gaze of these figures projects from the frame into another dimension through a *trompe l'œil* effect created by an infinity of folds that extend horizontally, and by the play of light and shadow. This gaze is then of a refractive nature not only due to the undulations and the bending of light at the level of the tapestry, but also because it passes obliquely from its own medium to another. The refracted gaze suggests not the final stability of static identity, but the deflected and detoured movement of aesthetic process.

Madeleine's relationship with the tapestry mirrors d'Albert's relationship with paintings and images of women. D'Albert admits:

Tout enfant, je restais des heures entières debout devant les vieux tableaux des maîtres, et j'en fouillais avidement les noires profondeurs.—Je regardais ces belles figures de saintes et de déesses dont les chairs d'une blancheur d'ivoire ou de cire se détachent si merveilleusement des fonds obscurs, carbonisés par la décomposition des couleurs.... A force de plonger opiniâtement mes yeux sous le voile de fumée, épaissi par les siècles, ma vue se troublait ... et une espèce de vie immobile et morte animait tous ces pâles fantômes des beautés évanouies ; je finissais par trouver que ces figures avaient une vague ressemblance avec la belle inconnue que j'adorais au fond de mon cœur.... (318-319)

Such meditation and imagination are not restricted to d'Albert's past. When he believes Madeleine/Théodore to be the incarnation of his "belle inconnue," he describes this ideal love as a work of art,

or more precisely an art *object*. The image of Théodore/Madeleine that d'Albert transposes into his text is always framed: he frames his object of desire with doors, windows, material and textures by which means she stands out against her background, yet is not quite part of d'Albert's scene. These acts provide him the means of seizing her body in a static state and of looking past the veil of her clothing in order to discover her secret in the same manner that he looks into other images or paintings.

The fact that d'Albert constantly objectifies Madeleine reveals once again the tension between static image and discursive text, the agitating force between two genres as well as two genders. When d'Albert describes Madeleine, he does so ekphrastically.³ He wants to write the image, give it life, yet fearing that the female object will usurp his role as desiring subject, the male artist simultaneously relegates this desired object to its previous space and realm. For Gautier, who is both a poet and a painter at heart, the image should not translate into and become poetry; there must be a constant and simultaneous occurrence of both, which is why he problematizes Madeleine as being both female and male, object of art and artist. The duel between gender and genre is constant in the mind of the artist. But this eternal oscillation of these dichotomies enables him and his narrator d'Albert to create an ideal aesthetic.

In a visual description of the ambiguity of Théodore/Rosalinde's gender, Madeleine's body is referred to by the outside narrator as an erotic and aesthetic image which he dares any voyeur's gaze to penetrate in order to discover truth or meaning:

Que le lecteur, s'il a la vue moins basse que nous enfonce son regard sous la *dentelle* de cette chemise et décide en conscience si ce contour est trop ou trop peu saillant; mais nous l'avertissons que les *rideaux* sont tirées (163; emphasis added)

Such a challenge develops into an insatiable quest in which all parties, all perspectives become included, not excepting the reader's, whose experience with the discursive text is analogous to that of the curtain. For as we "see," meaning or truth is located within the folds/drapery of the curtain⁴—of the stage or of the tapestry—and thus serves to reiterate Gautier's dictum of *l'art pour l'art*. Even if our imagination or intuition might grant us a glimpse of the other side of the lacy material of the shirt, our vision is arrested by the

initial barrier of the curtains. This barrier deflects the desirous gaze from the blinding center to the contours of the material itself.

Madeleine's relationship with the tapestry and its material folds follows the same pattern. Attempting to delve deeper into the tapestry's narrative, she focuses her attention on a huntress who stands out amidst imaginary birds and vegetation, nymphs who seem to be alive, and enchanting castles whose balconies display beautiful women. This figure symbolizes the identity, desires and fears of both Madeleine and d'Albert:

La chasseresse était là, debout, le pied tendu en avant, le jarret plié, son œil aux paupières de soie tout grand ouvert et ne pouvant plus voir sa flèche déviée de son chemin : et semblait chercher avec anxiété le phénicoptère aux plumes bigarrées qu'elle voulait abattre et qu'elle s'attendait à voir tomber devant elle percé de part en part. —Je ne sais si c'est une erreur de mon imagination, mais je trouvais à cette figure une expression aussi morne et aussi désespérée que celle d'un poète qui meurt sans avoir écrit l'ouvrage sur lequel il comptait pour fonder sa réputation . . . (287)

In fact, the huntress is a Diana figure who inspires desire in poets yet provokes fear and anxiety since she is complex, changing, mysterious and ambiguous. The triple image—Diana, the tapestry, and Madeleine—is the instigator of desire and the guardian forbidding its fulfillment.⁵ Goddess of love, Diana entrances and disturbs the artist in Madeleine as Madeleine will later excite and frustrate d'Albert. Try as she might, Madeleine cannot "read" the discursive nature of the visual tapestry just as d'Albert cannot be sure of having successfully "read" Madeleine's gender.

Although possession of desire's object is a tempting goal, Gautier insists that one should desire *desire*, and he critiques those who do not realize this necessity or aesthetic prerequisite: "Le manque d'intelligence les empêche d'apercevoir les obstacles qui les séparent de l'objet auquel ils veulent arriver ; ils vont, et, en deux ou trois enjambées, ils dévorent les espaces intermédiaires" (260). Erotic and aesthetic desire should therefore remain in the realm of simultaneous possession and dispossession. D'Albert, for instance, fears satiety and boredom if his erotic desires are fulfilled, just as he worries over the loss of his identity if he arrives at the end of his letters or finishes a poem, which explains his status

of *poète manqué* symbolized in the huntress referred to by Madeleine in the previous quotation. If Madeleine's curiosity regarding the other sex is satisfied, she too will experience sterility. Spatial and/or temporal distance must occupy the border between the desiring subject and the desired object, for only then can the lover become an artist.

Despite the desire to erotically undress and aesthetically unveil Beauty, d'Albert explains the danger of crossing the border:

J'ai désiré la beauté ; je ne savais pas ce que je demandais. — C'est vouloir regarder le soleil sans paupières, c'est vouloir toucher la flamme.... je voudrais ce qui ne se peut pas et ce qui ne se pourra jamais (192)

It seems that no one can possess Beauty although all that artists create is dedicated to her and accomplished in her name. In spite of his awareness of the dialectic, d'Albert lets himself be drawn into the illusion. Madeleine is equally aware of the necessity of absence and disguise, for it is only a matter of time that the artist becomes disenchanted with his creation and even with his muse. And yet she participates willingly in the illusion for she writes to d'Albert: "J'ai servi de corps à votre rêve le plus complaisamment du monde. — Je vous ai donné ce que je ne donnerai assurément plus à personne" (373). Madeleine symbolizes the dream of reality and the reality of dream. Because aesthetic and erotic desire must be defined at the limit, d'Albert preserves and eternalizes the image while subjecting it to time and contingency. As a result, artistic creation is based on simultaneous creation and destruction.

The tapestry symbolizes this process by feeding and developing the spectator's imagination at the same time as it prohibits ultimate knowledge. Taken in by the colors and texture as much as by the story behind the eyes that follow her movements, Madeleine's description of this tapestry embellishes and supports her narrative at the same time as it hinders it: "Mais laissons la tapisserie et revenons à notre histoire" (288), she writes as she seems to awaken from a dream. Madeleine affects d'Albert in the same way, as I have shown to be the case regarding ekphrasis. The ideas he recounts in his letters and the method by which they are conveyed are proof of the oscillation between creation and destruction.

If narration is taken to be the telling of events in their temporal sequence or the unfolding of the plot, description is what slows

down this linear movement. As a result, d'Albert's prose can be considered anti-narrative. In the space of approximately twenty pages, for instance, d'Albert's descriptive images serve as a full-charged and somewhat chaotic background (*cadre*) for Beauty *par excellence*—Théodore/Rosalinde as s/he enters the stage to play her double role in Shakespeare's play. Although these poetic *tournures* are much too lengthy to expound upon in detail in this discussion, I would like to draw attention to important key phrases which refer back to the elements of the tapestry and which, in turn, reflect Madeleine. Regarding change, movement and contours reflected in the façade of clothing, d'Albert writes of "des robes étoffées, ondoyantes, avec de grands plis qui chatoient comme des gorges de tourterelles et reflètent toutes les teintes changeantes de l'iris" (244). Such flowing movement of material matter corresponds to the artist's desire for "vers luisants." Because "le style [peut] dérouler à son aise, ... tout se noue et se dénoue avec une insouciance admirable" and "toutes ces contradictions sont comme autant de facettes qui en réfléchissent les différents aspects, en y ajoutant les couleurs du prisme" (245, 246). Only through such "apparences les plus frivoles et les plus dégagées" (247), can the artist truly express himself and his innermost dreams, which is the key to Gautier's entire aesthetic.

When d'Albert writes,

Je me suis joliment laissé aller au lyrisme, mon très cher ami, ... Tout ceci est fort loin de notre sujet, qui est, si je m'en souviens bien, l'histoire glorieuse et triomphante du chevalier d'Albert au pourchas de Daraïde, la plus belle princesse du monde ... (85-86),

he mocks his audience, for he actually considers his lengthy prose to be the subject. His story is an aesthetic manifesto more than an erotic love mystery. D'Albert continues: "Mais en vérité, l'histoire est si pauvre que je suis forcé d'avoir recours aux digressions et aux réflexions. J'espère ... qu'avant peu le roman de ma vie sera plus entortillé et plus compliqué qu'un imbroglio espagnol" (86), a desire certainly realized with the weight of his descriptive prose. The type of beauty in which he and Madeleine take interest is extravagant, superfluous and impossible. Gautier, too, testifies to this vision of beauty in his preface to this novel, stating that "je suis de ceux pour qui le superflu est le nécessaire" (45). While descrip-

tion, which paints a picture, tends to suggest stasis and death, narration designates movement, linearity and life.

D'Albert therefore attempts to convince himself, even as he tricks his readers into so believing, that there is a great narrative at hand. Quite a capable and manipulative artist in fact, he leads us on a long descriptive "journey" which only now and then breaks to the surface of the story by means of narration. Like Madeleine, he believes that in love as in literature, "*un juste retard donne de vivacité au désir*" (103). However, in order to persuade his aesthetically unconditioned bourgeois reader to continue reading, d'Albert writes:

Je contenterai ton envie avec le plus grand plaisir. Il n'y a rien de sinistre dans notre roman ; ... on n'y rencontre ni longueurs ni redites, et tout y marche vers la fin avec cette hâte et cette rapidité si recommandées par Horace. (102)

It becomes quite evident, however, that Horace has little to do with d'Albert's prose: "Que veux-tu que je t'écrive ...? — ... il y a presque du ridicule à faire parcourir cent lieues à une misérable feuille de papier pour ne rien dire ... — J'ai beau chercher, je n'ai rien qui vaille la peine d'être rapporté ..." (61) and, "Je n'ai pas de hâte d'arriver, puisque je ne vais nulle part" (64). Without descriptions, enumerations, run-on sentences, ellipses, and dream scenarios, the reader would arrive at the end in no time. D'Albert pretends to prefer (like his bourgeois audience) the end or the goal, but lies and artifice are actually the main ingredients of artistic creation: "Penser une chose, en écrire une autre, cela arrive tous les jours . . ." (25), writes Gautier in his preface. Description allows d'Albert to live his dream; narration comes to his rescue before he loses himself in an illusory world in which "[il] ne sai[t] pas voir ce qui est, à force d'avoir regardé ce qui n'est pas, et [s]on œil si subtil pour l'idéal est tout à fait myope dans la réalité ..." (98). But a retreat into either realm is no solution: Gautier demonstrates his aesthetic meditation of ideal "spirituality" and ideal "materiality"—that one should be both *beyond* the world and *in* the world.

Stressing this duality, d'Albert writes that "il n'y a peut-être pas sur la terre de fantaisie plus folle et plus vagabonde que la mienne ; eh bien, ... je touche mon horizon de tous les côtés ; je me coudoie avec le réel" (62). The alternation between the first- and third-person singular in the previous quotation, in which d'Albert

addresses himself as the hunter of Daraïde, refers to this double identity or a "split" self. He attempts to be simultaneously self and other, subject and object by means of seeing and considering himself in his creation through his own eyes, as does Madeleine with regard to the tapestry. The poet's very identity is caught in the same process and structure of aesthetics, for the limits of the outside and the inside begin to fold: "tout en moi est brouillé et renversé ; je ne sais plus qui je suis ni ce que sont les autres, je doute si je suis un homme ou une femme ..." (195), a situation which mirrors Madeleine's. This state of ambiguity and metamorphosis is desirable to him, for he dreads the boredom of sterile unity and actually dreams of being able to transform his identity and become another man, another woman, or even an object—desires symbolized by the act of looking into rivers and mirrors. Both d'Albert and Madeleine wish to be self and other, artists and works of art. Madeleine creates herself and is treated as an work of art by d'Albert who is himself a poem, according to Rosette (175). Gautier's friend Baudelaire will later give voice to this thought, explaining in "Le Peintre de la vie moderne" that "[c]'est un *moi* insatiable du *non-moi*, qui, à chaque instant, le rend et l'exprime en images ... toujours instables et fugitives" (692). The ambiguity of identity whether of self or of the other therefore coincides with artistic creation.

Madeleine/Théodore's ambiguous gender and beauty enables d'Albert to continue to muse and create. In d'Albert's meditation on the reenactment of *As You Like It*, by which he hopes to determine Théodore/Madeleine's sex once and for all as she interprets the role of Rosalinde/Ganymède,⁶ he writes a lengthy description of Madeleine's body in which the dualisms and interrelation of life and death, reality and illusion necessary to "true" art and "true" beauty are projected onto and reflected by the actress. The duality that Madeleine herself previously recognized in the tapestry becomes the source of d'Albert's admiration of Madeleine's body as both static and temporal. He writes that

sur le *fond* sombre du corridor ..., le chambranle sculpté lui servant de *cadre*, elle étincelait comme si la lumière fût émanée d'elle au lieu d'être simplement réfléchi, et on l'eût plutôt prise pour une *production merveilleuse du pinceau* que pour une créature humaine faite de chair et d'os.... — Comme on voit la *vie* courir sous cette transparence d'ombre, comme cette chair est *blanche*

et colorée à la fois! ...; quels ravissants poèmes dans les moelleuses ondulations de ces contours.... (264; emphasis added)

Madeleine cuts an uncanny figure. She is a living being as depicted by the blood running through her veins, yet the very mention that she resembles a work of art lends this description an atmosphere of impossibility. Madeleine occupies the borderland of beauty: subject and object, real and ideal. Above all, d'Albert admires the formal beauty of contour and shape (149) such as that of a marble sculpture (as evoked by Madeleine's white skin), yet he praises the beauty of color, sounds, and fragrances when he states "je ne circonscris point la beauté dans telle ou telle sinuosité de lignes" (150). What is the reader to make of such flagrant contradictions? These contradictions produce ideal beauty à la Gautier: Madeleine/Théodore exemplifies both painting and poetry, image and text, stasis and movement, death and life, and erotic/aesthetic beauty.

According to d'Albert, Beauty does not present herself in all her glory; she has hours of eclipse. The tapestry signifies the ambiguity between presence and absence, illusion and reality in the tension between light and dark shadows of its textures and contours which can be directly related to chiaroscuro, the technique of painting which treats light and shade in a way that produces the illusion of depth. As is the case with representation and signs, whether a picture or a word, beauty *is* and *is not*. Madeleine's beauty is both eternal and fleeting, present and absent, veiled and unveiled. D'Albert is only too aware of the dialectic as he attempts to render a totalizing description of Madeleine, but realizes that "les vers ne rendent que le fantôme de la beauté et non la beauté elle-même" (265). Even painting and sculpture are, to a certain degree, impostors.

Although classically nude, Beauty is also veiled with superfluous ornamentation characteristic of romantic painting and description. D'Albert, finally able to "possess" Madeleine aesthetically and erotically, writes that

[e]lle demeura tout debout comme une blanche *apparition* avec une simple chemise de la *toile* la plus *transparente*.... — Ainsi *posée*, elle ressemblait parfaitement à ces statues de *marbre* des déesses, dont la *draperie* intelligente, fâchée de recouvrir tant de charmes, enveloppe à regret les belles cuisses, et par une heureuse

trahison s'arrête précisément au-dessous de l'endroit qu'elle est destinée à cacher. (368-369; emphasis added)

As both a romantic and classical image, transparent and solid, Madeleine occupies the borderlands of Gautier's aesthetic ideal, which hovers between the classical lines of an Ingres and the romantic color of a Delacroix.

The transparent drapery does not only serve to evoke the ephemeral and the material, but also raises the question of ornamental and veiled beauty that Gautier considers crucial to art. This drapery "covering" Madeleine is a type of parergon theorized by Kant, whose aesthetic criticism influenced Gautier.⁷ According to Kant,

Even what we call "ornaments" [parerga], i.e. those things which do not belong to the complete representation of the object internally as elements, but only externally as complements, and which augment the satisfaction of taste, do so only by their form; as, for example, [the frames of pictures or] the draperies of statues (61-62)⁸

Ornament is superfluous. Yet it is this very "unnecessary" item that is the core of the structure of beauty as thematized in Gautier's dictum of *l'art pour l'art* and his critique of beauty as useless. A type of mask that not only protects and conceals, but also provokes and reveals, the parergon designates a version of beauty that is neither simply internal nor external. Madeleine's mask of Théodore de Sérannes typifies this duality: at times d'Albert perceives her as a man, at others the disguise allows him to intuit femininity. Even Madeleine admits that her *travestissement* renders her unsure of her gender. She does realize, however, that gender is artificial. And as art, her disguise becomes a learning procedure.

The result of these meditations is that "la beauté n'est pas une idée absolue et ne peut s'apprécier que par le contraste" (82), as in the light and dark portions of the tapestry's contoured fabric. According to the point of view of both protagonists, beauty is visualized in the female body: d'Albert admits to dressing effeminately and admires the realization of ideal Beauty incarnated in Madeleine/Rosalinde. She, in turn, is seduced by the soft contours of Rosette's body and calls her "la belle." Through this work, however, Gautier attempts to show that feminine beauty is not in

and of itself *ideal* beauty, and only since Christianity has it become a social and artistic phenomenon. Ideal beauty in the male form was celebrated in classical sculpture, which draws its aesthetic from before the time of Christ. Thus Madeleine acquires the sense of beauty in disguising herself as a man, yet she remarks "je parvins à faire d'une fille qu'on trouvait jolie un cavalier beaucoup plus joli" (221). Even d'Albert envies the beauty he sees in other men and is much more interested in Madeleine due to her virile disguise.

The coincidence of feminine contours with masculine linearity creates not only an ideal gender, but also beautiful art:

C'est en effet une des plus suaves créations du génie païen que ce fils d'Hermès et d'Aphrodite. Il ne se peut rien imaginer de plus ravissant au monde que ces deux corps tous deux parfaits, harmonieusement fondus ensemble, que ces deux beautés si égales et si différentes qui n'en forment plus qu'une supérieure à toutes deux... : pour un adorateur exclusif de la *forme*, y a-t-il une *incertitude* plus aimable ...? (212; emphasis added)

Gautier was one of the first in his day to appreciate the co-existence of masculinity and femininity in a body. His vision of ideal beauty is therefore naturally likened to an androgynous state.⁹ The body of the androgyne is not only Madeleine's body, but d'Albert's as well. Neither is quite sure of his/her sexuality because of the veiling and unveiling of opposites which create a space for the multiple possibilities they seem to feel and desire. Madeleine writes, "je n'étais plus moi, mais un autre" (223). The outside, her mask or veil, has determined her inside to the extent that she admits she would have a difficult time "à perdre cette habitude" (356). As a result, the linear space of the masculine combines with the tortuous space of the feminine and is integrated to a higher "androgynous" state. Madeleine destroys the woman in herself, and since she can never fully be a man, she becomes a "troisième sexe" occupying the borderland between the two.

Théodore/Madeleine plays out her ambiguity to the last. The outside narrator writes that after a one-night stand with d'Albert, Madeleine spends the same night with Rosette: the imprint of her body and two of the pearls from her costume as Rosalinde were found on Rosette's bed.¹⁰ When d'Albert and Rosette awaken, the ideal androgynous Beauty has disappeared. At the end of the

week, d'Albert receives a letter from her saying that the only trace he has of her *image* is that of her *text*:

Si cela vous désole trop de me perdre, brûlez cette lettre, qui est la seule preuve que vous m'avez eue, et vous croirez avoir fait un beau rêve. Qui vous en empêche? La vision s'est évanouie avant le jour, à l'heure où les songes rentrent chez eux par la porte de corne ou d'ivoire. (375)

Interestingly enough, when the image of ideal beauty leaves, d'Albert's text ceases. Thus the narrative begins and ends with Madeleine: it originates and closes *by* her and *about* her. She has succeeded in enveloping d'Albert in her aesthetic charms, which will haunt him like a dream. What he learns from her will impact his erotic and aesthetic endeavors: "en amour comme en poésie, rester au même point, c'est reculer. Tenez-vous-en à cette impression,—vous ferez bien" (375).

Madeleine's last wish for Rosette and d'Albert is: "[a]imez-vous tous deux en souvenir de moi, que vous avez aimée l'un et l'autre, et dites-vous quelquefois mon nom dans un baiser" (375). But in the space between their kiss lies the very sign of deferral and ambiguity, for neither Théodore nor Rosalinde is her real name and neither Rosette nor d'Albert is aware that she is called Madeleine. Madeleine remains both masculine and feminine, both Théodore and Rosalinde in the minds and hearts of her lovers. As a result, this form of closure represents the infinite.

The lover, the artist and the spectator are forever caught in a process, realized in the tapestry and in its image of the huntress:

Une des choses qui me frappèrent le plus, ce fut une chasseresse qui tirait un oiseau. — Ses doigts ouverts venaient de lâcher la corde, et la flèche était partie ; mais, comme cet endroit de la tapisserie se trouvait à une encoignure, la flèche était de l'autre côté de la muraille et avait décrit un grand crochet (287)

The arrow, focus of attention and locus of knowledge, bends to the degree that, from our perspective, which is that of Madeleine's, all we are allowed to know is that the arrow was, is and will be "toujours en l'air et n'arriv[era] jamais au but."¹¹ There is therefore no such thing as a totalizing form nor a final signified. In response, both image and text converge towards this method of creation of ideal beauty, towards a modernity which, as Baudelaire explains, is

le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable.... Cet élément transitoire, fugitif, dont les métamorphoses sont si fréquentes ... [e]n les supprimant, vous tombez forcément dans le vide d'une beauté abstraite et indéfinissable. ("Peintre" 695)

The tapestry represents both eternity and decay. The arrow which is simultaneously "figée" and "fuyante," symbolizes the duality of artistic creation, Beauty, and even the crisis of identity which perturbs these former elements. In the interstitial space between two opposite forms "meaning" emerges, a ceaseless metamorphosing of both matter and soul.¹²

The image of the tapestry does not function in order to represent a copy of the world; rather, it produces a new kind of reality, a new model of truth and a new conception of beauty symbolized by Madeleine. Through these images, we see that Gautier's modern, revolutionary aesthetic tends toward the artificial, be it gender, genre transpositions, costume, jewelry, lighting, frames, language or attitudes. With wit, irony, and originality, he displays his aesthetic beliefs in this "hymne à la Beauté" which is as much painting as it is poetry, real as it is ideal. The influence of Gautier's meditations on artistic minds throughout the nineteenth century reveals itself in the works of Baudelaire, Huysmans, and Oscar Wilde. Undeniably, Théophile Gautier's ideal is carried beyond his own space and time.

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Notes

¹ Verlaine writes of a similar situation in "Mon rêve familial" and Baudelaire, too, is preoccupied with such reverie in "Hymne à la Beauté."

² W.J.T. Mitchell addresses the pun on "cite"/"sight" in his article, "Ekphrasis and the Other" (696).

³ For a provocative study of ekphrasis and the politics of gender, see W.J.T. Mitchell, "Ekphrasis and the Other," as well as Scott. For a more traditional approach to ekphrasis and genre, see Krieger.

⁴ For an elaborated discussion of the fold as an image, see Deleuze.

⁵ Diana can be directly related to the Sphinx which occupies Gautier's aesthetic meditations on beauty. In his poem "Le Sphinx," he addresses these same issues of fear and desire, attraction and repulsion. Baudelaire's poem "La Beauté" exemplifies these very meditations. See also Bronfen.

⁶ It is interesting to note the problematics of *travestissement* in both d'Albert's production of *As You Like It* as well as in the performance of this play in Shakespeare's own day: Madeleine, a woman, disguises herself as a man who in turn plays a woman who dons man's clothing. The play is over, the novel ends, but what is *she* exactly? When Shakespeare's play was performed in England, it was a male actor who dressed up as a woman, later disguised himself as a man and then reassumed woman's dress. At the end of the play, still dressed as a woman, this actor addresses his audience in the epilogue, saying: "If I were a woman, I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleas'd me ..." (757). The play of reality and illusion is obvious.

⁷ Gautier's dictum of *l'art pour l'art* stems from Kant's aesthetic meditations in *Critique of Judgement*.

⁸ The bracketed words were added to the second edition of Kant's work in 1793.

⁹ Weil opposes the androgyne to the hermaphrodite. According to her analysis, the androgyne symbolizes harmonious oneness, classicism and masculinity while the hermaphrodite symbolizes change and metamorphosis, romanticism and femininity. But on a symbolic level, these terms can be used interchangeably. I therefore, along with many other critics, prefer to use the term "androgynous" in discussing both gender and genre.

¹⁰ The pearl is an important symbol because it designates androgyny, the fusion of two separate halves. See Fornasier.

¹¹ Gautier makes reference here to Zeno's paradox.

¹² Fittingly, Michel de Certeau writes that "through a ceaseless relation of each undertaking with its "opposites," it [discourse] assures a becoming, thus the possibility of a narrative for the immanence of the infinite" (31).

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Les Mémoires de Louise Michel: Travail de deuil et quête identitaire

Juliette Parnell-Smith

Dans sa dernière autobiographie, Louise Michel (1830-1905) laisse échapper ce cri révélateur: "Je parle peu, mais j'écris" (220). Cette remarque singularise immédiatement son auteur. En effet, la France bourgeoise du dix-neuvième siècle ne fut guère tendre pour les femmes écrivains. Reléguées à leur univers domestique privé, les femmes sont interdites de séjour dans l'espace public. Or, leur venue à l'écriture met en danger justement ce partage des sphères. Des critiques comme Sainte-Beuve ou Barbey d'Aurevilly furent très durs vis-à-vis des femmes auteurs, dont ils minimisaient la production littéraire.¹ Face à cette censure quasi générale, les femmes écrivains eurent bien souvent recours aux pseudonymes masculins, afin de pouvoir se faire publier tout en restant dans un anonymat protecteur.

Louise Michel, elle, choisit la voie contraire. Loin de se cacher derrière un nom d'emprunt, elle profita de la notoriété publique de son nom pour écrire. De plus, elle eut l'audace d'offrir sa vie en exemple à ses lecteurs, afin de les éduquer et de les convertir à l'anarchie. Quel fut donc le cheminement de cette femme si célèbre pour ses activités politiques mais dont l'œuvre littéraire est tombée dans l'oubli?

La renommée de Louise Michel débuta sous la Commune de Paris en 1871. Non seulement elle n'hésita pas à combattre sur les barricades, mais elle joua aussi un rôle politique important. Il est donc remarquable qu'elle ait joui de tels privilèges à une époque pendant laquelle, selon l'historienne Claire Goldberg Moses, les femmes étaient systématiquement exclues de toute activité politique ou civique. Elle émet cette remarque pertinente à ce propos: "highly trusted by the Commune and guard leadership, Michel was permitted to participate in all Commune activities at a level exceptional for a woman ..." (192). Célébrée par Victor Hugo dans son poème "Viro Major" pour sa conduite et ses réparties courageuses devant le tribunal militaire, Louise Michel fut envoyée en déportation en Nouvelle-Calédonie jusqu'en 1880. Après un retour triomphal en France, elle reprit son militantisme politique

et se mit au service de la cause anarchiste, pour laquelle elle fut à nouveau emprisonnée de 1883 à 1886. C'est pendant cette période d'incarcération qu'elle écrivit ses *Mémoires*.

Louise Michel a donc laissé essentiellement le souvenir d'une anarchiste, dont la vie aventureuse et tumultueuse est devenue rapidement légendaire. Cependant selon Daniel Armogathe, sa production littéraire a suscité bien peu de commentaires ou d'études:

Il faut bien avouer que l'ensemble formé par le vécu de Louise Michel et sa traduction littéraire n'a été jusqu'ici qu'effleuré. L'écrit surtout dont on s'est peu occupé, aveuglé qu'on était par l'éclat d'un héroïsme en actes. (3)

Les *Mémoires* de Louise Michel² publiés en 1886 posent une problématique intéressante à plusieurs niveaux. D'une part, nous sommes en présence d'un nouveau genre littéraire: l'autobiographie de militants qui selon Philippe Lejeune se développe dans la deuxième moitié du dix-neuvième siècle et dont l'objet serait de devenir "le lieu de l'élaboration de la conscience de classe" et de servir "à l'inculcation de modèles et de valeurs plus ou moins révolutionnaires" (256). D'autre part, Louise Michel prend la plume à une époque dont on a dit: "The political dimension in women's writing is what is generally most neglected" et "Non-fictional political writings from the period have until very recently been out of sight and out of mind" (Buck 58).

Afin de pallier à ce manque d'intérêt et d'enrichir le corpus critique sur Louise Michel, nous nous proposons de faire une lecture herméneutique et narratologique des *Mémoires* à laquelle nous ajouterons aussi quelques remarques destinées à démontrer la spécificité de ce texte au niveau de la poétique de l'autobiographie féminine au dix-neuvième siècle.

Le texte de Louise Michel ne répond certes pas aux critères établis. Si nous nous basons sur les travaux de Jane Marcus, Mary Jean Green et Norine Voss, les autobiographies féminines du dix-neuvième siècle ont pour public principal d'autres femmes. Leurs textes privilégiaient l'univers privé aux dépens de leur vie publique. Peu de femmes ont la prétention de faire œuvre d'historienne et qui plus est de composer un ouvrage politique, car ces deux domaines étaient alors exclusivement réservés au discours masculin. L'arène publique était généralement l'apanage de

l'homme et dans une société patriarcale, la femme est reléguée à la sphère domestique et au silence, car elle n'a pas d'histoire. Louise Michel, par conséquent, est exceptionnelle pour son époque, dans le sens où elle prétend faire une œuvre d'historienne en retraçant les événements de la Commune de Paris. Enfin, elle écrit un ouvrage politique pour convertir ses lecteurs à la cause anarchiste. Les *Mémoires* sont essentiellement une critique de la société capitaliste et le testament politique et public d'une femme, qui tient à laisser pour ses lecteurs, amis ou ennemis, le récit édifiant et exemplaire de sa vie de militante révolutionnaire.

Si nous comparons Louise Michel à George Sand et Marie d'Agoult, deux contemporaines ayant écrit elles aussi leur autobiographie, nous verrons que Michel conserve également toute son originalité. Sand consacre une bonne moitié de son texte à décrire sa famille paternelle et à privilégier l'image de la maternité, tandis que Marie d'Agoult se déclare être une martyre de l'amour, qui paradoxalement l'a libérée pour devenir une femme supérieure. Les deux femmes insistent sur leur rôle d'épouse et de mère. Louise Michel ne parle presque pas de ses origines, puisqu'elle était une enfant illégitime et nous verrons qu'elle occulte tout ce qui a rapport à la sexualité, l'amour, le mariage et la maternité. Louise Michel n'aspire qu'à une chose: laisser pour la postérité une image, dont elle est seule responsable. Cette curieuse insistance à vouloir contrôler à tout prix son identité publique, n'est certes pas gratuite. En effet, Louise Michel se retrouve dans une position instable, voire insoutenable, en 1886. Pendant la Commune, elle s'était courageusement construit une nouvelle personnalité, qui lui échappe totalement à son retour de déportation en 1880. Elle devient la victime de son immense et scandaleuse notoriété, qui l'immobilise et la réifie; dès lors, ayant perdu toute individualité propre, elle se retrouve réduite à devenir la représentation paradigmatique de deux idéologies antagonistes. Louise Michel est à la fois "la vierge rouge" pour les communards et "la tigresse altérée de sang" pour d'autres.

Voici quelques extraits³ de la presse contemporaine, qui illustrent ce phénomène: *La Nouvelle Lune* du 1er Avril 1883: "L'incandescente révolutionnaire qui a nom Louise Michel, la femelle rouge ... la vierge hystérique ... a eu—ne riez pas!—ses côtés femme." *Le Figaro* du 28 Janvier 1888: "C'est la sœur de charité de la Sociale, la Garde malade pharmaceutique et pétrolière

de la Révolution." *Le Rabelais* en 1895: "on dit Louise Michel comme on dit saint Vincent de Paul."

Notons au passage que l'éditeur des *Mémoires* reproduit lui aussi ces topoï dans sa préface mais à d'autres fins: "Pour bien des gens ... Louise Michel est une sorte d'épouvantail, une impitoyable virago, une ogresse ... Au besoin on l'accuserait de manger tout crus les petits enfants ..." (Roy i). De l'ironie, on passe à l'hagiographie,⁴ afin de non seulement démythifier son activité révolutionnaire mais aussi de saper les fondements de son image subversive (car trop masculine). L'éditeur repositionne Louise Michel dans une sphère plus appropriée, plus convenable à une femme auteur. Il insiste par conséquent sur les qualités féminines de son sujet: sa douceur, son abnégation ou sa piété filiale. Cette stratégie atteint d'autant plus son but, lorsque l'éditeur l'infantilise sciemment, en la représentant sous les traits d'une enfant terrorisée par sa mère: "Cette femme a quarante ans passés, était soumise comme une petite fille de dix ans devant l'autorité maternelle" (iv).⁵

Que peut donc faire Louise Michel face à ces discours réducteurs qui v(i)olent son identité privée et publique? Elle y répond par la publication de ses *Mémoires*. L'écriture non seulement lui donnera le moyen de rétablir la vérité et les faits, mais lui assurera aussi une tribune de choix et un auditoire. Une stratégie que Leigh Gilmore décrit ainsi: "writing an autobiography ... can be a political act because it asserts a right to speak rather than to be spoken for" (40).

Cependant, les *Mémoires* répondent aussi à une autre préoccupation: retrouver le passé et préserver ainsi le souvenir des morts, et surtout celui de sa mère Marianne Michel, décédée en 1885:

Oh! maintenant plus que jamais, par la fenêtre ouverte m'arrivent les senteurs des roses, du chaume, des foin coupés au soleil d'été Et tout reparait, tout revit, les morts et les choses disparues. Et plus que jamais je voudrais les revoir. (436)

Plus j'avance dans ce récit, plus nombreuses se pressent autour de moi les images de ceux que je ne reverrai jamais, et la dernière, ma mère, il y a des instants où je me refuse à le croire, il me semble que je vais m'éveiller d'un horrible cauchemar et la revoir. (27)

Son ouvrage obéit donc à un double impératif. D'une part, il s'agit de récupérer et de reprendre le contrôle de son personnage public et d'autre part effectuer un travail de deuil, qui aboutirait à l'émergence ou la reconfiguration d'une nouvelle identité. Louise Michel se heurte, en effet, à cette problématique: ayant perdu sa mère, le seul garant de son moi privé, elle doit s'en délivrer pour devenir enfin autonome et pouvoir ainsi reconstruire sa personnalité.

La relation entre Louise Michel et sa mère a suscité de nombreux commentaires comme ceux de Daniel Armogathe, qui juge leurs rapports comme: "une source d'infantilisation et de travestissement" (5). Louise Michel ne fut jamais reconnue par son père. Elle dût par conséquent porter le nom maternel, qui lui assurait ainsi une certaine stabilité au niveau de l'identité. Susan Stanford Friedman confirme d'ailleurs ce lien crucial entre mères et filles: "The mother-daughter relationship remains central to the ongoing process of female individuation" (42). La symbiose étroite entre les deux femmes explique la violence du désespoir de la fille à la suite du décès de Marianne. Cette mort/séparation engendre une perte irréparable et donc provoque le désir de retrouver ou de reconstruire la dyade pré-œdipienne. Martine de Gaudemar abonde en ce sens lorsqu'elle écrit:

Sans Marianne, Louise Michel s'effondre, comme séparée d'elle-même, perdue, anéantie dans son unité et dans son être. C'est du fond de cet évanouissement, de cette syncope, qu'elle se met à écrire: pour peut-être restaurer quelque chose de cette identité fragile, se donner un centre de gravité. La permanence de sa mère ... lui assurait cette sécurité ontologique, cette permanence identitaire.... (121)

La perte d'une telle influence peut donc provoquer l'effritement, voire l'anéantissement, du moi privé dans certaines circonstances que Vivien Nice explique ainsi:

A daughter's profound grief may then be explained in terms of the theory of separation, the daughter is seen as having failed to separate adequately from her mother and so has real problems "letting go" of her when she dies. Within this theory the daughter also has to face the world alone and as an adult which has not been practiced at doing. (207)

En bref, Louise doit accepter la mort de sa mère et une fois le travail de deuil accompli, l'intérioriser dans une nouvelle identité, comme l'indique Louise J. Kaplan: "The full work of mourning encompasses the rebuilding of our inner world and the restoration of the beloved in the form of an inner presence" (19). Nous verrons dans notre conclusion, comment Louise a su négocier ce difficile passage et paradoxalement provoquer cet (auto-) enfantement identitaire, qui l'amènera à devenir "la Velleda de l'anarchie."

Après cette discussion détaillée sur les prémisses et objectifs des *Mémoires*, il conviendrait à présent de nous attaquer au texte lui-même. Un premier travail se concentrera principalement sur le paratexte et la grille de lecture, qui est inscrite dans l'appareil préfaciel et épigraphaire mais aussi dans l'incipit.

Le titre "Mémoires" présuppose un type d'ouvrage, qui délimite immédiatement un horizon d'attente précis pour le lecteur. Marie-Madeleine Touzin définit ainsi ce genre: "L'auteur ... narrateur ... est un simple témoin des événements racontés ... l'accent est mis sur le récit d'événements historiques et non sur celui d'une vie personnelle" (8). L'indication épitextuelle (du titre) ajoutée au nom de l'auteur correspondrait bien à cette définition, puisque l'on devrait s'attendre a priori à un compte-rendu d'événements marquants ou à la description détaillée de personnages historiques importants. En fait, le lecteur est immédiatement déçu, si l'on examine le ton de la préface éditoriale du libraire-éditeur F.Roy. Non seulement il minimise, mais il ridiculise la force illocutoire du nom historique "Louise Michel." F. Roy nous offre une nouvelle pédagogie de lecture, qui semblerait entrer en conflit avec la première indication épitextuelle. Car loin de parler du personnage public, il privilégie au contraire le moi privé. Le lecteur s'attend par conséquent à parcourir le récit personnel et donc autobiographique de Louise Michel.

La dédicace apporte heureusement la solution. Ce texte, dont la disposition en versets juxtaposés asyndétiquement lui donne une structure proche du poème,⁶ a pour titre "Myriam:"

Myriam! leur nom à toutes deux:

Ma mère!

Mon amie!

Va, mon livre sur les tombes où elles dorment! (1)

Ces quelques lignes nous donnent la clé interprétative du mode de lecture ainsi que les marques de la composante discursive du texte à suivre. L'orientation dialogique est d'autant plus évidente par les nombreux signes de ponctuation affectifs qui, alliés au rythme et à la répétition du phonème "m," donnent au texte une certaine oralité. Louise Michel indique clairement que son "livre" est dédié à sa mère et à son amie Marie Ferré, qui deviennent ainsi les narrataires des *Mémoires*, plaçant ainsi le texte sous l'optique "d'un travail de la mort" (Gaudemar 121). Hélène Jaccomard souligne que: "le désir autobiographique naît irrésistiblement chez les écrivains atteints de maladie mortelle" (46). Souffrant d'une dépression aiguë, Louise aspire à la mort: "Que vite s'use ma vie pour que bientôt je dorme près d'elles!" (1). C'est le seul moyen de rejoindre sa mère et de reconstituer ainsi la dyade pré-œdipienne. La teneur nécrologique des *Mémoires* se comprend d'autant plus lorsque Louise Michel déclare: "ce livre est mon testament" (173).

Pourtant, Louise poursuit: "vous tous qui jugez par les faits" (1). Une fois de plus, nous avons ici les marques d'un discours dialogique, mais avec une autre entité. Ce "vous" est en fait la communauté, le public, avec qui Louise entame le dialogue dans une perspective à la fois apologétique et didactique. Le moi privé, qui tente de retrouver la mère disparue, cède le pas au personnage public qui, tout en justifiant ses actions passées, continue son œuvre de propagande pour le mouvement anarchiste. Nous avons donc ici plusieurs narrataires différents: Marianne Michel, Marie Ferré, les communards, ses adversaires politiques et tout lecteur prêt à se convertir à l'Anarchie.

L'incipit corrobore a priori cette interprétation: "Souvent on m'a demandé d'écrire mes Mémoires..." (3). Encore une fois, qui est ce "on," si ce n'est un narrataire collectif? Le choix du pronom passif neutre "on" indique aussi une certaine résistance ou réticence à parler en son propre nom. Cette hypothèse se vérifie dans la proposition suivante: "mais toujours j'éprouvais à parler de moi une répugnance pareille à celle qu'on éprouverait à se déshabiller en public" (3)⁷ et aussi dans la deuxième phrase: "Aujourd'hui, malgré ce sentiment puéril et bizarre, je me résigne à réunir quelques souvenirs" (3). Le mot "souvenirs" peut prêter à confusion ici, car s'agit-il de relater les événements importants de sa vie ou de préserver la mémoire de sa mère? En fait, la phrase suivante nous apporte la réponse: ces souvenirs seront "imprégnés de

tristesse". L'incipit donne une bonne idée de l'ouvrage en général. D'une part, il est clair que Louise prend pour narrataire le public mais d'autre part l'influence de la mère (narrataire) sur le texte est fondamentale et symptomatique des autobiographies féminines comme le montre Bella Brodzki:

The mother ... hovers from within and without. Still powerful and now inaccessible ... she is the pre-text for the daughter's autobiographical project. Indeed, these autobiographical narratives are generated out of a compelling need to enter into discourse with the absent ... mother. (245)

Si nous poursuivons notre découverte du texte et en particulier, les mécanismes de l'écriture elle-même, alors nous nous heurtons à une problématique, dont la complexité demande à être explorée plus en profondeur.

En effet, nous avons relevé les traces d'une écriture "féminine" qui se traduirait notamment par le rejet de toute temporalité linéaire: "Il faut me laisser écrire les choses comme elles me viennent" (27) et aussi par la prégnance du sémiotique sur le texte. Les *Mémoires* baignent dans l'oralité soutenue d'autant plus par le rythme, qui ralentit ou accélère le récit: "Je ne dis plus même la chanson de guerre: en silence je m'en vais, en silence, comme la mort" (29), "en écrivant, comme en parlant, je m'emballe souvent!" (38). A ces premières remarques, il nous faudrait ajouter d'autres exemples comme la pluralité des voix narratives, la multiplicité et variété des structures textuelles (dialogues, interpellations, interrogations, retranscriptions de lettres ou d'articles de journaux, poèmes, etc...). Nous devrions aussi mentionner la typographie apparemment capricieuse, qui mettrait en relief la disposition du texte destiné ainsi à devenir un poème en prose (cf: la dédicace). De plus, Louise Michel se joue ou joue délibérément de tous les registres, lorsqu'elle utilise à la fois tous ces temps verbaux dans son récit: passé simple, imparfait et présent. De même, elle emploie différents niveaux de langues comme l'argot des prisons, les patois ou le canaque. Enfin, elle déploie bien souvent une ironie subversive, qui a l'avantage de déstabiliser le discours masculin officiel dont elle se moque éperdument:

Quoi! Vous connaissez Louise Michel? Allez la rejoindre en prison; il n'y a que des anarchistes qui peuvent la connaître.... Et

c'est une femme encore! c'est là le comble. Si, seulement, on pouvait la berner ... avec l'idée que les femmes *obtiendront* leurs droits en les demandant aux hommes; mais elle a l'infamie de dire que le sexe fort est tout aussi esclave que le sexe faible....(135-136)

Devant ces excès de langage et ce discours non traditionnel, faut-il en déduire que nous avons ici toutes les marques de l'écriture "féminine?" Rien n'est moins sûr, car il nous faut néanmoins admettre que la venue à l'écriture pour Louise est de l'ordre du symbolique et non du sémiotique. En effet, elle reconnaît sa dette vis-à-vis de ses grands-parents paternels, qui l'ont ouverte à la poésie et à l'écriture. Elle déclare d'ailleurs qu'elle en partageait le style: "roulant, échevelant les mots, laissant l'écriture changer d'allure suivant la pensée" (127). De plus, elle signale que sa vocation littéraire se déclencha grâce à ses lectures de Lamennais et de Hugo.

Par ailleurs, lorsqu'elle décrit la mort de sa mère, la typographie du texte change avec l'existence de blancs. Louise perd sa voix et, paralysée par la douleur, elle donne la parole au journaliste Odyse Barot, pour relater l'enterrement de sa mère. On voit ici une tactique qu'elle utilisera plusieurs fois dans son récit. Pour légitimer ses idées ou donner une version objective des faits, elle retranscrit le texte d'auteurs masculins, car ils représentent après tout le discours officiel. Enfin, nous avons constaté l'existence d'une autre écriture, certes plus neutre et objective, lorsqu'elle décrit la flore et la faune de la Nouvelle Calédonie, car elle tenait à être reconnue par la communauté scientifique pour ses travaux de botanique.

Louise Michel ressemble quelque peu à cette description offerte par Sidonie Smith: "The autobiographer who speaks like a man becomes essentially 'a phallic woman,' an artificial or man-made product turned in the cultural and linguistic machinery of androcentric discourse" (53). Smith explique que les femmes célèbres, écrivant leur autobiographie, privilégieront leur réussite publique quitte à gommer leur féminité ou différence sexuelle. Louise Michel se démarque de sa mère, qui devient ici la représentation idéale de la féminité: "ma mère était alors une blonde aux yeux bleus souriants et doux, aux longs cheveux bouclés, si fraîche et si jolie que les amis lui disaient en riant: il n'est pas possible que ce vilain enfant soit à vous" (20). Une description

à contraster avec cet autoportrait: "grande, maigre, hérissée, sauvage et hardie à la fois, brûlée de soleil..." (20). Notre auteur revendique hautement que l'amour, le mariage, la maternité ne figurent pas dans son ouvrage. Elle s'en défend d'ailleurs auprès de ses lecteurs: "parlons aussi d'amour; on me reproche toujours que j'en parle jamais..." (113); une remarque tout à fait pertinente, qui montre la profonde ambivalence de Louise sur ce sujet. Elle accentue d'autant plus son asexualité lorsqu'elle révèle, par exemple, son goût pour le travestissement et ses activités "masculines."

Enfin, Louise Michel se distingue aussi de ses contemporains dans son organisation, méthodologie et mécanisme de lecture dans ses *Mémoires*. Dans le premier chapitre, elle expose le plan de son ouvrage qui se divise en deux parties bien distinctes: "La première toute de songe et d'étude; la seconde, toute d'événements..." (4). La première partie comporte dix-sept chapitres pour seize dans la seconde. Dans la première moitié du livre, Louise Michel suit un modèle relativement traditionnel, malgré l'absence d'une chronologie précise. Louise relate donc son enfance, sa carrière d'institutrice, ses débuts politiques à Paris, la Commune et sa déportation en Nouvelle-Calédonie. Cependant elle interrompt son récit aux chapitres neuf, onze et douze pour parler des femmes et de leur éducation. Son discours féministe lui permet d'exprimer ses sentiments: "je n'ai pas voulu être le potage de l'homme" (104) et ses idées politiques: "Esclave est le prolétaire, esclave entre tous est la femme du prolétaire" (109). Elle finit par devenir le porte-parole de ses consœurs: "Ce chapitre n'est point une digression. Femme, j'ai le droit de parler des femmes" (112).

Dans la deuxième partie des *Mémoires*, le récit devient décousu et le discours envahit de plus en plus le texte. Michel intitule d'ailleurs plusieurs chapitres "digressions." Le tissu narratif s'effiloche en fragments disjoints, ajourés de blancs de plus en plus fréquents dans les derniers chapitres, car la douleur la réduit finalement au silence: "On comprendra pourquoi, sur... la mort de mon amie et celle de ma mère, je cite plutôt les amis qui ont raconté ces tristes jours que je ne les raconte moi-même" (429). Une autre distinction remarquable de son écriture est l'interruption du récit par des poèmes, car les vers, selon Louise Michel, sont plus aptes à exprimer ses sentiments intimes.

Cette organisation s'accompagne également d'une méthodologie novatrice au niveau de la structure et de l'écriture du récit. En effet, Louise se propose de raconter sa vie au hasard de l'impression de ses souvenirs et refuse ainsi la rigidité d'une chronologie linéaire: "je prends pour ma pensée et ma plume le droit de vagabondage" (4). En outre, elle réclame le droit de ne pas adhérer aux règles du genre. Elle préfère adopter l'écriture de la rupture et la fragmentation (certainement plus aptes à la réminiscence). Elle procède par association de souvenirs plutôt que de suivre un plan défini:

Certains amis me disent: Racontez ... votre temps de la Haute-Marne. D'autres ... racontez ... depuis le siège seulement. Entre les deux opinions, je suis obligée de n'écouter ni l'une ni l'autre et je raconte comme les choses me viennent." (67) ⁸

Enfin, il faut souligner son ton direct, voire autoritaire: "où aurait-on le droit d'être soi-même et d'exprimer ce qu'on éprouve, si ce n'est dans des Mémoires?" (287) et à la fin du premier chapitre, elle s'exclame: "Je me rappelle que j'écris mes Mémoires, il faut donc en venir à parler de moi: je le ferai hardiment et franchement pour tout ce qui me regarde personnellement ..." (6). Bien que l'on retrouve dans le texte certaines ressemblances avec les autobiographies féminines comme l'ambivalence de se livrer au public, l'incertitude à propos de la validité du projet autobiographique ou le doute quant à l'exemplarité de sa vie, Louise Michel se distingue de ses consœurs quant à l'objet de ses *Mémoires*. Elle désire se soumettre au jugement du lecteur: "Pour nous, tout jugement est un abordage où flotte le pavillon; qu'il couvre mon livre comme il a couvert ma vie, comme il flottera sur mon cercueil" (7). Nous avons ici un texte dont la forte composante discursive est fondamentale surtout dans la deuxième partie. Louise Michel ne s'intéresse ni à raconter sa vie ni à décrire des événements historiques importants. En fait, son livre est le prétexte à reconstruire les bases de son identité officielle.

Il s'agit à présent de dévoiler les différents moments de cette (re)conquête du moi public de Louise Michel. Elle y procède de plusieurs façons. D'une part, il y a une auto-destruction du personnage mythique, d'autre part nous retrouvons un mélange savamment dosé entre la confession, l'auto-justification et l'apologie, le tout teinté fortement par une rhétorique didactique

et politique. Car elle est avant tout le porte-parole de plusieurs groupes comme les communards et les anarchistes.

Louise Michel retarde curieusement l'explication de sa vocation révolutionnaire. On la sent réticente à se livrer au lecteur: "Maintenant, les jours d'enfance sont esquissés et voilà, étendu sur la table, le cadavre de ma vie: disséquons à loisir" (47). Cependant les cinq premiers chapitres de la seconde partie sont essentiels, si l'on veut comprendre la genèse de son moi privé et public. Dans sa quête identitaire et pour le bénéfice de son lecteur, Louise Michel effectue sa propre "psychobiologie."⁹ Elle parle de son hérédité et dépeint son environnement initial, afin que nous puissions comprendre les prémices de sa révolte et vocation révolutionnaire: "les idées dominantes de toute une vie ont leurs causes matérielles dans telle ou telle impression, ou dans les phénomènes de l'hérédité ou autres" (224). Les récits héroïques du grand-père, auxquels il faut ajouter ses soirées à l'ecrène (conteuse) du village ont provoqué sa pitié, indignation et ultimement sa révolte:

Ma pitié pour tout ce qui souffre ... alla loin; ma révolte contre les inégalités sociales alla plus loin encore; elle a grandi, grandi toujours, à travers la lutte, à travers l'hécatombe; elle est revenue de par-delà l'océan, elle domine ma douleur et ma vie. (231)

Le mode confessionnel adopté ici permet à Louise Michel de clarifier ou de justifier ses actions passées et à venir. Son auto-analyse a pour objet de rétablir la vérité sur son compte et de détruire les mythes engendrés par ses amis ou ennemis. Ce discours sert en fait à consolider et à enrichir son image officielle. En outre, Louise Michel éprouve aussi une grande jouissance de pouvoir enfin s'expliquer au grand jour. Hélène Jaccomard écrit aussi: "l'autobiographie est aussi une prise de parole destinée à réduire les interlocuteurs au silence et à se faire écouter d'eux" (367). L'écriture autobiographique est ici à la fois un acte libérateur et un exutoire, à travers lesquels elle exprime sa colère et sa révolte contre la société et le discours patriarcal, qui l'ont maintenue dans la marginalité:

L'homme ... est le *maître*; nous sommes l'être intermédiaire entre lui et la bête Je l'avoue, avec peine ... nous sommes la caste à part.... Quand nous avons du courage, c'est un cas

pathologique; quand nous assimilons facilement certaines connaissances, c'est un cas pathologique. (404)

ou "Souvenez-vous de ceci, femmes qui me lisez: On ne nous juge pas comme les hommes" (403).

L'apostrophe au lecteur/trice est un procédé courant dans les *Mémoires*. Nous avons déjà mentionné l'oralité qui se dégage du texte par sa composante dialogique, l'importante présence textuelle du/des narrataire(s), la forte proportion de questions rhétoriques, des impératifs et de la typographie émotive. Leur fonction en est claire, car il s'agit pour Louise de régler ses comptes avec le public. Par conséquent, elle va engager un dialogue constant avec lui:

Rassurez-vous encore, messieurs; nous n'avons pas besoin du titre pour prendre vos fonctions quand il nous plaît! ... Nos droits, nous les avons. Ne sommes-nous pas près de vous pour combattre le grand combat, la lutte suprême? Est-ce que vous osez faire une part pour les *droits des femmes*, quand hommes et femmes auront conquis les droits de l'humanité? (111-112)

Par ailleurs, l'importance grandissante des fonctions idéologiques et de communication du narrateur, garantit aussi une lecture "correcte" du texte.

La reconstruction de son identité publique s'articule principalement autour d'éclaircissements ou de mises au point concernant les fausses rumeurs ou mensonges émis à son sujet: "Puisque je suis en train de liquider plusieurs choses ... je veux parler une dernière fois ... du courage dans les prisons, et en finir avec l'héroïsme!" (273). Nous avons ici un bon exemple du travail auto-destructeur que Louise effectue sur son personnage mythique. Cependant, elle en profite aussi pour se défendre: "il importe à mon honneur, après les révélations qui nous ont été faites, d'insérer dans mes *Mémoires* certains de mes articles du journal la *Révolution sociale*" (263).¹⁰ Elle recopie donc ses articles pour prouver leur authenticité ainsi que leur contenu, car, dit-elle, ses adversaires ont tronqué et manipulé délibérément ses écrits pour la compromettre. Dans le même esprit de clarification et de justification, elle consacre un chapitre à faire le bilan de son œuvre littéraire, dont elle établit une nomenclature précise. Enfin, elle reproduit également le texte de lettres personnelles et de certaines conférences.

Parallèlement à la réhabilitation de son personnage public, Louise Michel commente également ses choix idéologiques et sa carrière politique. Pour ce faire, elle adopte une autre stratégie narrative, lorsqu'elle subtilise à son propre discours un autre mode d'expression, celui du pouvoir patriarcal. Consciente de son "anomalie" (une femme politique!), elle se sert de la voix masculine pour parler de sa vie publique et légitimer ainsi son militantisme. C'est ainsi qu'elle incorpore à son récit des collages textuels, qui sont tirés de la *Gazette des Tribunaux* ou d'autres journaux de l'époque, qui relatent ses tournées conférencières, ses procès à propos de ses activités révolutionnaires ou son rôle dans les manifestations anti-gouvernementales. En outre, elle reproduit intégralement le manifeste anarchiste écrit par Emile Gautier et proclame hautement son allégeance au mouvement, quand elle s'écrie: "Rétablissons les faits: ce sont mes convictions qu'on poursuit en moi; j'ai donc le droit de mettre ici le manifeste ... comme j'avais ma place au procès des anarchistes et j'en partage toutes les idées" (400).

Cette préoccupation avec son image publique traduit le dilemme de Louise Michel, qui privilégie avant tout son identité officielle aux dépens de la sphère privée. Cette ambivalence s'explique pour plusieurs raisons. Patricia Meyer Spacks indique que choisir une carrière politique peut aider à s'échapper d'un environnement par trop restrictif. Louise Michel le dit ouvertement lorsqu'elle déclare:

Combien de fois suis-je allée dans les réunions d'où les femmes sont exclues! Combien de fois, au temps de la Commune, suis-je allée, en garde national ou en lignard, à des endroits où on n'a guère cru avoir affaire à une femme! (406)

Il faudrait mentionner aussi sa marginalité au sein de la société de son temps. Fille illégitime: "Je suis ce qu'on appelle bâtarde" (459), femme célibataire, militante révolutionnaire, elle est difficilement identifiable. Il ne lui reste plus que la sphère publique pour lui assurer une identité stable et permanente. Spacks ajoute d'ailleurs: "All [women] have written accounts of their lives in which they describe themselves ... as gaining identity from their chosen work" (113). Il n'est donc pas étonnant que Louise Michel ait subordonné son moi intime à l'anarchie.

Ainsi la célèbre anarchiste a réussi à reprendre en main le contrôle de son identité officielle. Mais quand est-il de même pour son moi intime qui s'est dangereusement effrité à la mort de sa mère? Il nous faut donc revenir à ce travail de deuil que sont les *Mémoires*: "Jeune je suis restée, à travers tout et, jusqu'à la mort de ma mère, peut-être, j'eus le cœur jeune; depuis ce jour là il n'y reste pas une goutte de sang" (86). La révolution ne devient-elle pas, dès lors, l'unique permanence dans sa vie? "[A]près ce coup terrible; ma mère me restait, ma mère et la Révolution. Maintenant je n'ai plus que la Révolution" (421). Cette juxtaposition des mots mère/Révolution annonce un dépassement qui la sauvera du désespoir. Julia Kristeva décrit une telle démarche pour résorber le deuil et elle explique la dépression comme une ambivalence du sujet vis-à-vis de la disparue. Dans ses *Mémoires*, Louise Michel manifeste plusieurs fois un sentiment de culpabilité à l'endroit de sa mère. Elle se reproche de l'avoir délaissée et abandonnée pour la politique.

Pour faire contrepoids à sa perte, le/la déprimé(e) a recours à la sublimation. Kristeva élabore: "à la place de la mort et pour ne pas mourir ... je produis—... un artifice, un idéal, un 'au-delà' que ma psyché produit pour se placer hors d'elle: ex-tasis" (110-111). Cet "idéal" s'incarne chez Louise dans la figure allégorique de la Révolution, qui remplacera désormais sa mère. La dyade pré-œdipienne est donc reconstituée, car Louise s'abandonne complètement à cette nouvelle incarnation maternelle: "O Révolution! mère qui nous dévore/Et que nous adorons..." (374). Le discours amoureux auparavant adressé à Marianne: "ma bien-aimée" se tourne vers un nouveau narrataire:

—Et votre cœur, où le jetterez-vous?

—A la Révolution! (97)

ou plus loin: "Oui, barbare que je suis, j'aime le canon, l'odeur de la poudre, la mitraille dans l'air, mais je suis surtout éprise de la Révolution" (242). Ayant subsumé son sexe et son moi intime à la Révolution, Louise Michel ne s'appartient plus. L'enfant, l'artiste, l'institutrice adopte une nouvelle identité: "la dévote de la Révolution" (56).

Par ailleurs, nous pourrions ajouter que la mort de Marianne Michel est une rupture à nouveau au niveau du langage pour sa fille. Par cette mort, Louise est obligée d'accepter la loi du père, si absent soit-il, afin de conquérir ici non le langage mais l'écriture.

Cependant, elle réussit à contourner "l'incontournable," en transformant l'ordre du symbolique paternel en une figure féminine maternelle, celle de la révolution. Cette rupture/libération est d'autant plus évidente que les *Mémoires* seront son premier texte majeur en solo, alors qu'auparavant, elle partageait la couverture de ses livres avec d'autres auteurs. Elle avait donc enfin trouvé sa voix.

Les dernières phrases des *Mémoires* reprennent le ton de la dédicace mais à cette différence près, qu'il en émane un nouvel espoir, un devoir à suivre: "Myriam! Que votre nom à toutes deux termine ce livre avec le tien, Révolution!" (461). L'apostolat anarchiste est prêt à se déployer. Le paratexte confirme d'ailleurs cette observation, puisque les derniers mots du livre sont: "fin du premier volume."

En effet, Louise Michel produisit à partir de 1886, un corpus littéraire important. Outre ses pamphlets politiques et ses recueils de poèmes, elle écrivit aussi une trilogie de romans à thèse (anarchiste): *Les Microbes humains* (1886), *Le Monde nouveau* (1888), et *Le Claque-dents* (1890). On joua ses pièces *Nadine*, *Le Coq rouge* et *La Grève* à Paris. Son ouvrage sur la Commune connut un vif succès en 1898. Dans un manuscrit de *Souvenirs et aventures de ma vie*, ouvrage posthume publié en 1905, elle écrit: "la vie privée ayant disparu pour moi mon existence se mêle à celle de tous, et je m'en vais par le monde; chez moi partout et nulle part, dans la lutte sociale qui approche du déchirement final" (4).¹¹ Pour Daniel Armogathe c'est son texte le plus politisé, car il est principalement au service du mouvement anarchiste. Louise n'existe plus, puisqu'elle appartient désormais à la Révolution.

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Notes

¹ Les femmes ne pouvaient produire que des œuvres "mineures" comme les romans idéalistes, sentimentaux, épistolaires ou toute littérature didactique à l'usage des enfants.

² Il existe une traduction remaniée en anglais des *Mémoires*: *The Red Virgin. Memoirs of Louise Michel* (Ed. and trans. Bullit Lowry and Elizabeth Ellington Gunter. Tuscaloosa: Alabama UP, 1981).

³ Nous avons parcouru des coupures de journaux rassemblées par Lucien Descaves, dont on peut consulter le fonds très important à l'Institut International d'Histoire Sociale à Amsterdam. Le premier article a pour titre: "Louise Michel Littérateur" et il a pour cote COM 43. Celle de l'article du *Figaro* est COM 33, et celle du troisième article, qui a pour auteur Adrien Farge, la directrice du *Rabelais*, est COM 35.

⁴ L'éditeur n'hésite pas à la comparer à Saint Martin, car elle donne souvent les vêtements qu'elle porte aux pauvres. Nouvelle sœur de charité: "elle est l'abnégation et le dévouement incarnés" (Roy ii), elle est digne des premières "martyres chrétiennes" (vi).

⁵ Peterson parle de l'influence déterminante des éditeurs masculins sur les autobiographies féminines. Ils encourageaient leurs femmes auteurs à rester dans leurs rôles traditionnels de filles, d'épouses ou de mères.

⁶ L'effet poétique est d'autant plus évident avec l'allitération du phonème "m," (Myriam, ma mère, mon amie, mon livre, ma vie, dorme etc....) qui renforce ainsi le topos maternel.

⁷ On pourrait expliquer son auto-dévalorisation à la lumière du passage suivant par Patricia Meyer-Sparks: "In writing of themselves, ... women of public accomplishments implicitly stress uncertainties of the personal, denying rather than glorifying ambition, evading rather than enlarging private selves" (132).

⁸ André Gide suit aussi cette méthode dans *Si le grain ne meurt*: "Je ne compose pas; j'écris mes souvenirs tout comme ils viennent" (384).

⁹ Mot inventé par Louise Michel.

¹⁰ Elle fait référence ici à sa collaboration au journal anarchiste *La Révolution sociale*, qui était financé secrètement par Andrieux, le préfet de police.

¹¹ Cette citation, écrite à la main de Louise Michel, se trouve dans un cahier datant de 1904 à l'Institut International d'Histoire Sociale à Amsterdam. Ce manuscrit a pour cote COM 5.

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Assia Djebar's *Vaste est la prison*: Platform for a New Space of Agency and Feminine Enunciation in Algeria

Valerie Orlando

Assia Djebar may be defined as many things: activist, intellectual, feminist, filmmaker, novelist, and historian. Winner of the prestigious 1996 Neustadt International Prize for Literature, Djebar (along with Egypt's Nawal El Sadaawi) is one of the most influential North African women writers in the world. Djebar was born in Algeria during that country's nearly century-long battle for freedom from French colonization. That revolution culminated in 1954, creating an Algerian republic. However, even though some Algerian women unveiled themselves in various roles as freedom fighters (as documented in such works as Frantz Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism*), after the revolution many women of all classes found themselves being forced back into subservient roles, according to supposed Islamic tradition. Djebar, whose father taught French, was sent to school in France, and thus grew up with a sensibility closer to her French feminist counterparts, rather than to fundamentalist ideals. This international experience set the stage for Djebar's lifetime of activist struggle on behalf of subordinated Algerian women.

From her early novels, *La Soif* (1958), *Les Impatients* (1958), and *Les Enfants du nouveau monde* (1962) to her most recent works, Djebar has offered her readers over thirty years of feminine "exploration." This exploration most often encompasses the difficulties of being a woman in the three phases of Algerian history: the colonial era, the revolutionary years (1954-62), and the post-independence period (1962 to the present). However, regardless of the era, Djebar speaks out, demanding to define and to interpret women's roles in Algerian history, politics, and culture. These roles more often than not have been neglected due to women's lack of representation, voice, and presence in both Algerian and French annals of history. Djebar was originally trained as an historian, but while still a student, she determined that, in order to reach a wider audience, she would translate her research into fiction rather than use straight historical documentation. In and out of trouble with

Algerian authorities for her outspoken work, she silenced herself voluntarily for ten years. It would not be until 1978 that she would reemerge, but this time with a film, *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*, thus launching the third stage of her career. Throughout the last thirty years, Djebbar has sought to reinstate the nearly obliterated Algerian female presence through her films and her texts in order to keep its memory alive. From cataloguing the stories of women who fought in the Franco-Algerian Revolution, to searching in ancient archives for the stories of lost Algerian princesses and heroines, Assia Djebbar has made it her life's work to make a place of importance for women in her homeland.

"Je ne pleurerai pas mes amies d'Algérie," the author states in an article in *Le Monde*. Instead of tears, Djebbar creates a platform on which she writes of herself, other women, and the present atrocities being committed against the people of Algeria.¹ She does not cry, because,

[c]'est précisément ce qu'on demande aux femmes chez nous, à celles qui sont douées de parole et d'éloquence: d'être des pleureuses, d'apporter un certain niveau de lyrisme à la catastrophe et au malheur. Leur rôle traditionnel, c'est cela: une parole d'après le désastre. Je ne veux pas m'y plier. Non, je ne pleurerai pas mes amies meurtries en terre algérienne. ("Assia Djebbar" XII)

Djebbar's work is as controversial as ever in Algeria, a sign of which is the fact that she has had to live and work abroad for the last several years. She is currently Director of the Center for French and Francophone Studies at Louisiana State University, as dramatic events continue to rock Algeria. Djebbar's platform outside Algeria is the result of a number of factors, the principal one of which is the hostile political climate created by the fundamentalist movement (led by the political party known as the Front Islamique du Salut).² This movement, full of religious zealots, has gained momentum, menacing intellectuals, academics, authors, and philosophers since 1990.³ The country's present conflict centers around a violent *jihad* or holy war, which has continued ruthlessly since 1992 between Islamic fundamentalists and the latest Algerian government, that of President Liamine Zeroual. Algerian feminists like Djebbar are concerned that if hard-line religious extremists take control, the

women of the country will continue to be forced into subservient positions.

In *Vaste est la prison* Assia Djebbar not only rewrites history and critiques the present-day violence against Algerian women, she also condemns the oppression of an entire intellectual milieu which is viewed as threatening by the current fundamentalist movement. Therefore, her objective as an Algerian-feminist-historian-author-filmmaker-intellectual is to note down not only a history for Algeria as seen from a woman's point of view, but also to fight for intellectual freedom in favor of all those who have been oppressed. The successful outcome of both these objectives has proved to be dangerous and almost impossible since the end of the Franco-Algerian revolution.

As an author and an intellectual living in exile, Djebbar must forge a new interactive space of reflection for herself and others who live on the "outside." She achieves this by *returning to history* and *rewriting/refilming* its past for Algeria in the hope of establishing new ground on which to open a dialogue for intellectual freedom and female emancipation. Not only does the author seek to write in/on her new space of Algerian feminine intellectual discourse, she also hopes to create a platform for a new institution of cultural, intellectual and artistic thought; something which has had little guarantee in post-revolutionary Algeria. Since 1962, little has been done to offer intellectuals the freedom required to install any tradition of political or cultural debate in Algerian society (Bensmaïa 86). Any intellectual practice has had to be set up "on the fringes"—almost secretly—or in exile. This "ex-centric" space, which expands outwards to France, the United States, and other parts of North Africa, recreates a peripheral intellectual milieu. The maintenance of this space has become necessary for some semblance of free intellectual process among Algerian academics, journalists, authors and philosophers. As Djebbar states in her most recent novel, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*, "getting away" and reviewing Algeria's socio-political situation from the outside is the only means by which an author/intellectual will gain the courage "à retourner, là-bas, au milieu du sang qui gicle, faces de jeunes tueurs sugissant ..." (21).

It seems that a safe-haven must first be created "on the outside" of Algeria's interneicine warfare to cultivate intellectualism and to promote its eventual institutionalization in Algeria. (In-

deed, the name "Djebar" is a pen name which means "healer" in Arabic.) In this regard, for Djebar, creating social and cultural institutions which might hold together new systems of discourse is a paramount theme in *Vaste est la prison*. Djebar envisions such institutions as being able to encompass not only historical discourse, but also discourses of feminism, language, culture, as well as identities such as "French" and "Algerian." In a sense, within her ex-centric space, Djebar is forming a "plane of consistency,"⁴ or a site of multi-faceted thought, on which terms her identity as a woman, researcher, intellectual, historian, and Algerian author writing in French, may be mediated.

Djebar's popularity in the Western world counters her lack of support (both as a public intellectual and politically as an activist) in Algeria due to that country's deeply-rooted anti-intellectual climate after independence, which was slowly woven into the sociopolitical fabric of Algerian society. This anti-intellectualism (against males and females) unfortunately is a legacy of colonialism and a product of the post-revolutionary military governments which, although espousing a progressive socialist rhetoric in the early years of independence, in reality chose to rule Algeria with an iron fist since the revolution. Réda Bensmaïa reiterates this, stating that one of the reasons Algerian journalists, authors, artists and philosophers have been the brunt of so many vehement and violent attacks by Islamic fanatics is that they have never achieved any status, recognition, or support from the public in post-revolutionary Algeria. Therefore, they are little-known or recognized for the benefits they would offer the public and society as a whole:

If we refer to what is happening at this moment in Algeria, what is striking is the contrast which exists between the insignificance of intellectuals as a 'group' and the violence which is harming them. If there is a paradox, it is to see the distance which separates the little regard for intellectuals during almost three decades of independence and the fury inflicted upon them now which throws them in prison, forces them into exile, kills them or assures that they lose all taste for being teachers, advocates for political liberty, defenders of personal rights or even architects of a transparent society where the individual and the citizen would coincide. (86)

In the same context and in light of the current Algerian political instability and public hostility toward intellectuals, Djebbar's novel *Vaste est la prison* may be considered as targeting two essential items of importance for the fostering of a new intellectual movement in Algeria.

First is the need for "writing down" women's stories from history. As the author indicates, it is not until women write *their own* history and stories, and thus establish agency, will they gain *their own* place in Algeria. The collective "they"—the effaced—become empowered through the author's pen on both personal and larger social levels. It is this "they," family and friends, which is revived in *Vaste est la prison*, forced by Djebbar to recapture a lost voice; to review their history through her pen strokes:

Le sang dans mon écriture? Pas encore, mais la voix? La voix me quitte chaque nuit tandis que je réveille les asphyxies douceâtres de tantes, de cousines entrevues par moi, fillette qui ne comprenait pas, qui les contemplait, yeux élargis, pour plus tard les réimaginer et finir par comprendre. (337)

By extension, this passage also suggests that it is imperative to create and subsequently maintain a space of intellectual thought, where freedom of speech is guaranteed and where feminist, philosophical, and theoretical discourses may be cultivated. However, whether Djebbar is in France, the United States, or other parts of the globe, her message is always clear: one must establish a platform from which to speak and one must be guaranteed the power of enunciation.⁵

Tzvetan Todorov underlines the importance of speaking as a key to subjectivity in his work, *Du bilinguisme*. He writes "Si je perds mon lieu d'énonciation, je ne parle pas, donc je ne suis pas" (24). Djebbar continues to dedicate herself to the "re-vision" of women's history in Algeria in *Vaste est la prison* (1995), which depicts the plight of a wide range of Algerian women who have the same thing in common: an overarching patriarchal domination. To demonstrate commonality within such diversity, Djebbar employs a narrative strategy which is equally diverse; one which blends historic accounts, autobiography, legends, and traditional folk tales. Added to these, Djebbar's narrative agenda in *Vaste est la prison* incorporates many aspects of her own life. Indeed, some sections are nearly autobiographical.

Besides content, Djébar experiments with the stylistic aspects of her work as well. For instance, she weaves in an element of the cinematographic, reusing scenes and phrases from her films (well-known to many of her Francophone readers). This cinematic overlay not only adds her experiences as a filmmaker to those of the other women she describes, but this device also provides another lens through which she may lay bare for her readers a different interpretation of supposedly "accepted" masculine constructions of the feminine body, while problematizing women's expected place/role in the phallocratic constructions of Algeria. Through the venues of historic revisionism, autobiographical details and cinematographic representation, this new space of agency is forged, solidified, and destined to be maintained by Djébar who struggles for human rights as an author and as an intellectual. It is Djébar's exploration of "outside" agency and the development of a three-pronged narrative strategy promoting the aforementioned modalities of autobiography, post-colonial and colonial historic revision, and her cinematographic journal that grounds a new intellectual milieu of enunciation for the author and for the exiled of Algeria.

Vaste est la prison is a multiply-organized⁶ text which crosses positionalities of history, autobiography and cinematic journalism, therefore denoting the constant transitory manner of Djébar's new kind of speech—one which promotes the goal of feminine empowerment. Through the ever-shifting boundaries of these textual modalities, Djébar once again empowers women, as she breaks apart stagnant, traditionally-fixed parameters of feminine identity to explore the unknown of Algerian women's unwritten history. Brought out through these varied textual modalities of history, autobiography, and cinematographic journal are the themes of movement and exploration. Djébar's feminine characters of many classes, like herself, search for identity and feminine place outside stereotypes, masculine domination and religious dogmatic oppression. These constraints, Djébar suggests, have hindered Algerian women's access to self-representation in history as well as in the sociopolitical arena of contemporary Algeria.

Vaste est la prison is not a novel in a traditional sense. Each chapter centers around a different female figure who may speak in either the first or third person. From chronicling the life of the Countess Adélaïde, exiled to Naples after the fall of Napoléon in

1815, to an Algerian mother who in 1960 takes off her veil to travel to France to visit her son (a political prisoner being detained in Metz, France), Djebbar's women grapple with instability and the consequences of experiences outside their socioculturally designated roles. As nomads and fugitives, Djebbar's heroines in *Vaste est la prison* tell their stories of war, oppression, and abjection. Often these women are forced to find new spaces of feminine identity in diverse areas. In *Vaste est la prison*, language, love, dance, film and travel all become roads to self-expression and liberty in an "outside" active space of agency.

The first few pages of *Vaste est la prison* depict Djebbar's struggle not to lose the power of voice. She maintains that construction of such an enunciative milieu implicates a transition from the oral to the written text. Djebbar realizes that although painful, "Longtemps, j'ai cru qu'écrire c'était mourir, mourir lentement" (11), writing is a necessary act; one which stabilizes and counters the passage of time and memory and solidifies the oral stories of Algerian women:

Oui, longtemps, parce que, écrivant, je me remémorais, j'ai voulu m'appuyer contre la digue de la mémoire, ou contre son envers de pénombre, pénétrée peu à peu de son froid. Et la vie s'émiette; et la trace vive se dilue. (11)

Her space of agency acts as a sheltering site⁷ where Djebbar is able to critique all aspects of society, culture, and history in both collective and autobiographical terms. Within *Vaste est la prison*, all facets of historical revision have equal ground, all places have equal influence, all "prisons are opened" and all women have a voice:

Je n'inscris pas, hélas, les paroles des *noubas* trop savantes pour moi. Je me les remémoire: où que j'aïlle, une voix persistante, ou de baryton tendre ou de soprano aveugle, les chante dans ma tête, tandis que je déambule dans les rues de quelque cité d'Europe, ou d'ailleurs, alors que quelques pas dans la première rue d'Alger me font percevoir aussitôt chaque prison ouverte au ciel, ou fermée. (172)

Djebbar's "rememorizing"⁸ narrative rests as an example of what Pierre Bourdieu remarks is "the logic and effectiveness of a language institution [which depends on] authority." This authority "comes to language from the outside" and invests within the

orator the power of speech (109). Creating her sheltering site of enunciation in exile grants Djébar the authority to remember and to reinscribe. Although exiled from Algeria, she establishes agency through a "re-memorization" process which, constructed from the modalities of autobiographic accounts, historic revision, and cinematographic journal entries grounds her novel as a metaphorical "polyphonic discourse" for Algeria where "les morts qu'on croit absents se muent en témoins qui, à travers nous, désirent écrire!" (346).

Reviewing the past and the present both historically and autobiographically, although painful, is a necessary process in rewriting a feminine history for Algeria. Djébar's polyphonic discourse, incorporating both sides of her own heritage, affords her the means to review her politico-cultural situation as a feminine author writing from abroad about her country's history. Because she is forced to review Algerian history and present-day conflicts from the "outside" in France, the United States, and elsewhere, Djébar is able to redefine the meaning of "bi-culturality" and "duality." Her disdain over France's colonization of Algeria cannot be denied. However, at the same time, because France has provided the author with a platform from which to write, it evokes a certain tolerance for what Djébar calls, "l'autre en moi." This Other is explored as an appendage to her Self as well as something exterior: "La France alors, c'était pour moi simplement le dehors" (*Vaste* 260). Although use of the French language is problematic for many contemporary authors writing in the language of their former colonizers, Djébar has subverted its stigma in order to find a means of liberty; the freedom to venture out and to explore. French evokes for the author a feeling of detachment, thus allowing for a method of access both professionally (because it enables her to research Algerian history as depicted in French archival colonial documentation) and personally, through memories she has divided between Algerian and French worlds.

Djébar uses her autobiography often to allude to larger social situations concerning Algerian women. The author's introspection is realized through the narrative of her own painful experiences living as a woman who comes up against constant male barriers. Although autobiographical, her pain reflects that of many women who find themselves caught: victims of Muslim tradition, masculine domination, and limited freedom within the confines of

home and family. One example Djebbar provides in *Vaste est la prison* is her separation from her husband. The upheaval, she notes, erases her own subjectivity because her identity depends solely on her role as wife and mother. When she announces her divorce, her family is more concerned with saving face and family honor than her own individual well-being:

"Après", me dis-je—je ne sais plus si j'entends par là "après la séparation définitive d'avec l'Aimé", ou simplement après la scène que je vécus ensuite avec l'époux, la nuit de mes aveux dérisoires, ce scandale dont j'imposai les conséquences, certes, dans un mutisme hautain, à mes parents désorientés—la brutalité et le désordre conjugal leur paraissaient naïvement relever de mœurs d'un passé révolu, ou d'un modernisme corrompu. Or ils faisaient confiance à ma "droiture"—, une cousine me rapportait leur commentaire tandis que je ne pouvais que me taire. Après ... L'invraisemblable, je ne m'en explique pas tout à fait la raison! En effet, deux ou trois semaines après cette rupture, j'acceptai, oui, j'acceptai de reprendre ma vie d'épouse. ... J'acceptai, oui, je revois le déroulé du retour—qui semble s'effriter, maintenant que tout est fini, que tous les liens sont à terre et ma passion évaporée.... Oui, je retournerai à la prison. (95-96)

Djebbar's experience and the subsequent choices she is forced to make because of family, tradition, and culture are furnished as general examples of the constricting universe which all Algerian women face. This universe is split between the freedom of independence (which often carries the price of exile) and the reality of oppression (the product of feminine submission and conjugal imprisonment):

La résolution qui me hantait au cours de mes nuits agitées impose ses mots—mots français, enrobés étrangement de l'ardeur rauque de l'aïeule, la terrible morte:—Entre l'époux et moi, dorénavant mettre une porte! A jamais. (108)

The author's final choice to rid herself of her domestic bonds seems almost "foreign" because it is so rare in her traditional Muslim milieu. Even more curious is the fact that the idea to flee from her husband comes to the author in French words rather than in her native Arabic.

Djebar also aligns herself with other women forgotten in Algerian history. She too remarks on the feelings of "la dépouille" brought on by exile and isolation. Whether from the past or the present, playing large or small roles as queens or peasants, these heroines prove their strength to persevere and to pull themselves from the depths of seclusion and oppression in order to reach a free space of agency. To "have a self and a world," therefore assuring "a certain kind of being in the world, which [could] be called [a feminine] politics" (Spivak 105-6) is the fruit women will enjoy through the reinstallation of their stories in history. By rewriting history, Djebar reestablishes feminine communicative agency. Such agency is beneficial for women because it grants a space of commonality for feminine subjectivity, politics, and socio-economic freedom. Therefore, Djebar's global message favoring feminine intellectual thought also may be viewed as promoting feminine community. Whether from the mountains of Algeria or the streets of Paris, Djebar's women form "political solidarity." This kind of solidarity does not objectify all women under one guise of sameness, but instead incorporates all the cultural, personal, and political transformations of women.⁹ By rewriting feminine history, Djebar fuses historic and contemporary voices into a space of resistance, reestablishing political solidarity, and the desire to cross-fertilize a new discourse for feminine intellectual thought.

Djebar's language in *Vaste est la prison* thus is molded between her autobiographic voice and her process of historic revision, thus reifying in her own manner language, the world of women, silence and love:

Silence de l'écriture, vent du désert qui tourne sa meule inexorable, alors que ma main court, que la langue du père (langue d'ailleurs muée en langue paternelle) dénoue peu à peu, sûrement, les langes de l'amour mort; et le murmure affaibli des aïeules loin derrière, la plainte hululante des ombres voilées flottant à l'horizon, tant de voix s'éclaboussent dans un lent vertige de deuil—alors que ma main court.... (11)

The act of writing forges the link of her own autobiography in the present to these historic "ombres voilées," and therefore leads Djebar to resurrect the unsolved feminine mysteries of the pre-/post-colonial specters of her homeland.

Issues from Algerian history both during and after colonialism are integrated in Djebbar's narrative agenda in *Vaste est la prison*. Clarifying the female role in such issues constitutes the theme of the second and third portions of this novel.

One previously orally-transmitted story about women in colonial Algeria which Djebbar reifies in written form is that of "la fille du mokkadem du saint Ahmed ou Abdallah." The author re-narrates the young woman's story, explaining how she married two husbands "de la montagne" only to leave them to migrate back to her native village in order to raise her daughter on her own. This act of defiance is a clear break from the traditionally subservient role most readers expect of Muslim women. The young girl's rebelliousness is resurrected as an important story when Djebbar takes the ancient oral narrative, passed down by her own grandmother, and rewrites it on paper:

Encore maintenant, trois quarts de siècle après, je ne sais pas, moi, Isma, la narratrice, moi, la descendante—par la dernière des filles, si Lla Fatima ("mamane") a aimé ses deux maris successifs ensuite, ou l'un plutôt que l'autre, ou l'un plus que l'autre.... Je suis bien certes la seule à m'interroger ainsi sur des morts! (228)

In writing down Algerian oral history and incorporating it into the novel, Djebbar gives concrete presence to both the narrative and this protagonist. For the first time, the transitory oral speech of this lost Algerian woman is fixed in time and space. Writing down their histories transforms her female characters into empowered women who are rendered into subjects rather than objects. In such a space, the author's voice becomes *collective*, virtually "le sang de l'écriture," (345) full of power and presence, where at last those women who were erased by male domination during the passage of time are resurrected; "Ecrire, les morts d'aujourd'hui désirent écrire" (346).

On a more global level, Djebbar's rewritten feminine history-as-novel extends outward to form new "border zones" of culture, historicity, intellectual thought, and feminism among thinkers in the world. These "border zones" become the sites of a "creative resistance to the dominant conceptual paradigms" of the West (Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices* 6). This resistance thus redefines the processes of the West's appropriation of the language and the

culture of the Other's space. Djebbar remarks that it is important to maintain these zones in order to reinstall the lost "mémoire" of Algeria into the modern day.¹⁰

Reinstating an Algerian memory with a complete female presence and creating a platform from which to instigate the commencement of a new process of documentation for Algerian post-revolutionary history are two objectives Assia Djebbar seeks to fulfill in *Vaste est la prison*. These are particularly important for women of Algeria and of the Maghreb as a whole, since feminine representation (whether in colonial or Muslim documentation) has either been grossly orientalized in the case of the former, or oppressed by the latter. The historic "trou de mémoire" of Algeria and all of the Maghreb, as Fatima Mernissi suggests in her book *Sultanes oubliées*, has drastically reduced feminine representation in Islamic countries to a bare minimum.

[L]es femmes musulmanes en général, arabes en particulier, ne peuvent compter sur personne, érudit ou pas, "impliqué" ou "neutre", pour lire leur histoire. Cette lecture est leur entière responsabilité et leur devoir. Notre revendication de la jouissance pleine et entière de nos droits humains universels, ici et maintenant, passe nécessairement par une réappropriation de la mémoire, une re-lecture—reconstruction d'un passé musulman large et ouvert. Certains devoirs peuvent d'ailleurs se révéler non des tâches austères et contraignantes, mais de délicieux voyages vers les rivages du plaisir. (188)

Therefore it is necessary for women of the Maghreb to make a transition toward reinscription of their own stories—toward the reappropriation of feminine memory.

Djebbar also constructs her space of agency in *Vaste est la prison* in aesthetic terms, paying considerable attention to the cultivation of the visual, sensual, and "musical" in her text. In this third section of her novel, the author now also becomes a "narrative filmmaker," as she casts her characters in filmic roles which mirror her actual work as a cinematographer. In a blend of cinematographic "allusions" in the text, Djebbar compels the readers to follow a textual camera. This section entitled "Un silencieux désir" becomes a narrative film complete with a musical score. Djebbar writes seven small "movements" (each with a separate title) to be used in the *montage* of her text to tell her autobiographical experi-

ences as a film director, recount the tales she has heard passed down to her, and describe her life-long efforts to filmically chronicle the lives of other women. This "filmic" section of the novel consists of cultural and historical events, glimpsed through the lens of her narrative camera, as she shoots the diverse aspects of the feminine: body, voice, and personification.

Within this cinematographic space, "Un silencieux désir" continues the novel's themes of feminine exile and nomadism. This section of the novel moves quickly, developing strength and resonance. Interspersed are short, staccato scenes entitled "Femme arable I", "II", "III"¹¹ in which Djebbar narrates the difficulty and the pleasure she experiences in directing her films. "Femme arable I" begins with Djebbar's personal reflections on making her earlier films in post-revolutionary Algeria. She pays particular attention to her 1978 film, *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*.¹² This film, made in Arabic, also weaves historic feminine stories with contemporary feminine issues. *La Nouba* is particularly interesting because its feminine theme forces the audience to "take stock" of women's position in Algerian society some fifteen years after the revolution. The fact that Djebbar, a woman filmmaker, "ventures out" to discover and expose the real participation of women in the revolutionary process, reminds the audience of the feminine contribution that has been overshadowed because of traditions which only favored the male elite once the revolution was won.

In order to link the themes from her film (*La Nouba* now almost twenty years old) to her novel, *Vaste est la prison*, Djebbar brings out the common thread of the continuing necessity for a revision of feminine history and of the importance of a woman (particularly a Muslim woman) "venturing out" to establish subjectivity and to affirm her place of agency. The particular issue of "venturing out" is explored in *Vaste* and in the 1978 film in parallel scenes. In the film "her" husband (presumed to be Djebbar, the filmmaker) is a shadowy presence, confined to a wheelchair, "castrated because of his broken body" after a fall from a horse. Her liberty from domestic servitude, poignantly indicated in the film, leaves the young researcher free to travel and to gather information on her own.

As in the *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*, Djebbar begins her narration in "Femme arable I" of *Vaste est la prison* with the identical image of a handicapped man depicted in shadow, con-

fined, and kept from entering the space of women by his own incapacitated body:

Le 18 décembre de cette année-là, j'ai tourné le premier plan de ma vie: un homme assis sur une chaise de paralytique regarde, arrêté sur le seuil d'une chambre, y dormir sa femme. Il ne peut entrer: deux marches qui surélèvent ce lieu font obstacle à sa chaise d'infirmes. Chambre comme une autre, chaude, si proche et si lointaine à la fois: le lit est large, bas, entouré de multiples peaux de mouton blanches adoucissant la rudesse des murs hauts de la demeure paysanne. A la manière ancienne, la dormeuse a serré ses cheveux dans un foulard rouge. L'époux immobilisé regarde de loin. Il a un mouvement du torse; sa main s'appuie au chambranle, une seconde avant que finisse le plan. (173)

By rendering this one man physically handicapped, Djebbar evokes a certain feminine allegiance with the *dormeuse* (who, in the film, curiously resembles the author) and with the historic women figures of the ancient harems the young *actrice* is representing. These women were confined in a space created, formed, and maintained by men. This destabilizing or castrating of the male gaze and dominance; "L'époux immobilisé regarde de loin," turns the tables on masculine power and feminine objectification.

Djebbar's male figure is unable to dominate the feminine body with his gaze, he is rendered incapacitated and unable to penetrate the room of the sleeping woman. Disordering the ordered normalized male role of "gazer" and appropriator of the feminine redefines what Laura Mulvey describes as "a world ordered by sexual imbalance [where] pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female [it is here where] the determining male gaze projects its phantasy on the female figure which is styled accordingly" (27).

Djebbar's film-text in *Vaste est la prison* gives to Algerian women of all echelons the "active" world they have rarely enjoyed. Her destabilization of this traditional passive feminine space (in this case an inviting harem room set up for optimal male pleasure) grants women freedom from masculine penetration in both metaphorical and physical terms. The cloistered passive women of Algeria's past succeed in compelling Djebbar to act as an agent for their visual and narrative reinscription into history.

By evoking her film work in the novel, Djebbar calls our attention to the fact that the cinematographic space, like the writing space, allows the author/director to create and subsequently organize a feminine space of agency, reconfiguring normalized images in favor of feminine control. These images promote new parameters for Algerian feminine subjectivity. Djebbar remarks in *Vaste est la prison* on the stimulation she feels as a woman in total control of her subjective space and as the promoter of feminine agency:

Premiers 'plans' de mon travail: une certaine défaite de l'homme. J'ai dit: 'Moteur.' Une émotion m'a saisie. Comme si, avec moi, toutes les femmes de tous les harems avaient chuchoté: 'moteur'. Connivence qui me stimule. D'elles seules dorénavant le regard m'importe. Posé sur ces images que j'organise et que ces présences invisibles derrière mon épaule aident à fermenter. (173-74)

The author's cinematographic space built on this "défaite de l'homme" also becomes a negotiating space for feminine freedom. The driving force—*le moteur*—behind each scene reinstates "ces présences invisibles" from the historic past.

Djebbar concludes *Vaste est la prison* as she began it, from an activist's point of view. She devotes the last few pages to a young woman journalist who died in Algeria. Djebbar describes her life and death as "le sang de l'écriture" (341). The scene revolves around Yasmina, "jeune professeur, mais aussi correctrice d'un journal indépendant" (343). This woman provides an example; she is but one martyr among many who die each day in Algeria. After stating she could never leave her country, "Je ne peux vivre hors d'Algérie, non!" (344). Yasmina, demonstrating strength and courage like so many women before her, is gunned down in 1994.

In order to keep alive the memory of Yasmina and so many others like her who have died, Djebbar continues to write and make films. Continuing to hone a new space for intellectual thought and historic revision, she attests that her very existence depends on her writing and that she must always write as if tomorrow were her last day:

Quand j'écris, j'écris toujours comme si j'allais mourir demain. Et chaque fois que j'ai fini je me demande si c'est vraiment ce qu'on attendait de moi, puisque les meurtres continuent. Je me demande à quoi ça sert. Sinon à serrer les dents, et à ne pas pleurer. ("Assia Djebbar" XII)

For Djébar, writing is the sole means of protesting a prison that is so vast its borders and its exits are almost indeterminable. It is only from her polyphonic place of exile that Djébar finds the means to break free of the violence which characterizes Algeria today.

From Djébar's dissident exiled status she can speak out, question and draw the attention of others to the current violence in Algeria. She and her nation have suffered the perpetuation of a culture of war "qui évacue les origines politiques du nationalisme contemporain, [et qui] a fini par généré des automatismes redoutables auprès d'une partie de la jeune génération" (Stora, "Absence" 67). It is up to Djébar, as well as to other authors and intellectuals like her, to reconstruct history as they think it should have been told; to forge a new space for future Algerian intellectual discourse: a space which will foster a more complete remembrance and subsequent rewriting of a forgotten history. Writing in exile as a "fugitive en ne le sachant pas" (*Vaste* 167),¹³ Djébar nurtures the voice within her Self in *Vaste est la prison* as well as that of all the Selves of Algeria which cannot speak, or have not yet spoken:

Ecrire pour cerner la poursuite inlassable
Le cercle ouvert à chaque pas se referme
La mort devant, antilope cernée
L'Algérie chasserresse, en moi, est avalée. (348)

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Notes

¹ At the writing of this paper Islamic terrorist groups continue to threaten, kill, rape and maim women in Algeria. The intensity of the war against the people (most particularly women and children) has only increased in the last year. In January 1997 one BBC World Service report (of which there have been many since on the turmoil in Algeria) stated:

Today it has been reported that fourteen people had their throats cut in a small village in Algeria. Five of the people killed were young girls. It is believed that the ultra militant Islamic fundamentalist group, the GIA, are to blame for the massacre.

² Curiously, as Djebbar states in an interview with Clarisse Zimra in 1992, the fundamentalists accuse her of "pandering to the expectations of the former masters," rather than targeting her gender as the principal reason for their actions against her (Zimra 151).

³ At the writing of this article it is widely believed that, although highly visible as an organized body which inflicts violence on the populace, the FIS is not the sole entity to be exclusively blamed for murders. Many Algerian experts believe that the official military (predominately the FLN party) is also to blame for a number of murders of intellectuals and journalists.

⁴ "Plane of consistency" is a term borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari's work, *A Thousand Plateaus*. The plane is a mediating space on which entities collide, fuse, *detrterritorialize* and *reterritorialize* to form new connections and diverse cultural exchanges.

⁵ The idea of movement "outside," to another space in order to enunciate her history is also carried on in her later work, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*. In that 1995 work, Djebbar's autobiographical journal repeatedly is written from somewhere else: Paris, California, Europe. The outside provides a milieu of peace and reflection, a means in/by which to reflect on "là-bas, au milieu du sang..." (*Blanc* 21).

⁶ See Françoise Lionnet's work *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity*, particularly her reappropriation of Teresa De Laurentis's theories on Third World women writer's "multiply organized" texts. This sort of text, Lionnet explains, implicates a subject which "speaks several different languages (male and female, colonial and indigenous, global and local, among others)" (5).

⁷ This term I have appropriated from Françoise Lionnet's critical work, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*.

⁸ Toni Morrison has cultivated and used the concept of "rememory" extensively in her work.

⁹ See Lionnet's *Postcolonial Representations*, 3.

¹⁰ This has played a part in stifling any memory process. This memory "numbing" and the consequent rewriting of the Algerian war and colonial history by the newly installed militant government immediately after the war in the mid-1960s has led Benjamin Stora and other historians of Franco-Algerian history to ask, "faut-il voir dans la falsification, dans la réécriture de la guerre de l'Indépendance, en Algérie, l'une des causes de la nouvelle guerre?" (Stora, *Absence* 63); that is a rise in fundamentalism and lack of human rights which are engulfing a generation of Algerians. In 1965, following the coup d'état de Boumediene, the "new" government of Algeria opted to "rewrite" the history of the Franco-Algerian war. The FLN became the new power of "légitimation symbolique" (Stora, *Gangrène* 229) wiping the slate clean of all individual actors/heros of the liberation struggle in order to install the massive socialist notion of a history "par le peuple pour le peuple." (229):

Les idéologues du parti optent délibérément pour une histoire massive résumée par la formule lapidaire "par le peuple et pour le peuple", qui, en réalité, consiste à éliminer tous les acteurs du mouvement national (avant et pendant la guerre) que les canons du système n'ont pas retenus. (229)

From 1966 onward, this new *écriture de l'histoire* provided that all libraries and bookstores would be controlled by a strict code of historic interpretation handed down by the government. In 1974, this system was permanently installed by the creation of the *Centre national d'études historiques*. The *Centre* became responsible for monitoring and controlling all historic research (229).

¹¹ A "femme arable" indicates a woman who is "cultivated" in the sense of "worked," transformed, molded—almost like clay—into something better, *améliorée*.

¹² Very few copies of this film exist as it was not widely distributed. It won the Critic's Prize at the Venice Biennale in 1979. For more information, see Blair.

¹³ See also Djebbar's article of this name in *L'Esprit Créateur*.

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